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Divergent Dictions: Contemporary Dominican Literature

Néstor E. Rodríguez

Translated from the Spanish by Kerstin Oloff

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Introduction

In the cultural production of the contemporary Hispanic Caribbean, there exist texts that are defined by their uncomfortable position in relation to the cultural doxa that serves as their backdrop and intellectual reference point. Over the last thirty years, this iconoclastic strand has become stronger in the literary production from Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Its characteristic tendency is to offer an account of the fundamental transformations of the Caribbean ethos. These transformations are the direct result of local adaptations to the global pressures exerted on culture and daily social practices. Literature is thus redefined as a space in which fragile models of cultural identity begin to diverge from accounts that normalize national identity. The present study analyzes this critical impulse in the literary imagination of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, concentrating on the literary and cultural history of the Dominican Republic, an area that tends to be neglected in academia.

This study starts from the premise that a nationalist intellectual heritage prescriptive of the ways in which one is supposed to read Dominican culture continues to exert influence in the contemporary Dominican Republic. I am here referring to a tradition that has its beginnings in the origins of the Dominican State in the nineteenth century and that can be traced up to the present day. While one must carefully differentiate its various discursive faces throughout history, this continuity exists. My intention is to identify the epistemic variables that have permitted its prolongation and to describe the socio-political circumstances that have enabled it to remain the primordial matrix in the theorization of Dominican national identity. Furthermore, I hope to highlight the processes by which the social imaginary is

colonized internally as a result of this discursive mold's pernicious influence. A symbolic form of violence creeps into the frameworks of everyday life and settles in the space where social agents turn into subjects. The facts that can be cited as evidence are as numerous as they are dramatic. Take for instance the fact that in a country where the dominant part of the population is composed of mulatos and Blacks, the vast majority do not think of themselves as such, but prefers to use the phantasmagoric category of the "indio" [literally "Indian"; a reference to the original indigenous population] to refer to their racial condition. Consider also the motivations that were behind the construction of a gigantic mausoleum in 1992. The building is the resting place of the alleged remains of Christopher Columbus and projects a cross of light up into the sky as an emblem for the nation's Christian foundations. One may also analyze the power constellations that still allow the political opinions of the ecclesiastical elite to fill up the newspapers' front pages. Or one might examine the reasons behind the demonization of the diaspora by the island's intellectuals. As we will see, all of these examples refer us back to the same rhetorical fulcrum.

In the first chapter, I will set out to dismantle the premises sustaining this discourse as a body of knowledge. I examine its origins in the lettered culture of the nineteenth century and trace it up to the period of the dictatorship of Rafael L. Trujillo (1930-1961) when it reached its institutional status. In the subsequent chapter, I proceed to show through an analysis of the essays of Manuel A. Peña Batlle (1902-1954), Joaquín Balaguer (1906-2002) and Manuel Núñez (1957) how this stagnant theoretical apparatus could live on into the present and perpetuate a monolithic conception of the Dominican nation and culture. I argue that this was partly a result of its beneficial link to political power but also of the post-dictatorship intelligentsia's inability to overcome the nationalist lexicon.

This discussion serves as a prelude to my study of the diverse strategies employed by writers and intellectuals to lay siege to the nationalist knowledge system in chapter 3. I begin my mapping of this "counter-narrative" with an analysis of the poetic production of three important authors from the era of the dictatorship: Manuel del Cabral (1907-2000), Tomás Hernández Franco (1904-1952) and Aída Cartagena Portalatín (1918-1994). I set out to illustrate the way in which these three poets articulate an indirect critique of the model of cultural identity extolled by the Trujillista intelligentsia. In order to do so, I emphasize the way in which the early poetry of Hernández and del Cabral goes against the cultural establishment's representation of the national subject as racially uniform. Something similar occurs in the poetry of Cartagena produced during the later stages of Trujillismo, even if the thematic variables she privileges are not race and ethnic origin but rather the consolidation of a feminine subjectivity discordant with the patriarchal order that interpellates her.

The oblique critique of the Dominican ethos voiced in the poetry of Cartagena, del Cabral and Hernández is transformed into a frontal attack on its premises in the contemporary literature of the island. I justify this line of argument in the fourth chapter with an analysis of the narrative of Aurora Arias (1962) and Rita Indiana Hernández (1977), as well as through an examination of a collection of poems by Manuel Rueda (1920-1999) entitled Las metamorfosis de Makandal [The Metamorphoses of Makandal] (1999). In the latter, I identify a strong impulse to subvert the ideal of a fixed cultural identity sheltered in traditional representations of the national subject. His poetry challenges the rigidity of the latter. With similar objectives, Arias and Hernández use parody and seek to degrade the body of knowledge that serves as the matrix of the nation, translating it into the broader discourse of mass culture. This gesture of rupture reorients the discussion on national identity towards the

theme of consumption and the "mundialization of culture," to use Renato Ortiz's phrasing employed in his description of the contemporary "planetary" moment. Societies have been affected by standardization not only on a technological and economic but also on a cultural level. This leveling of the cultural order, however, does not entail the disappearance of differences, but rather their adaptation and reconfiguration, which take place in such a way that "the totality penetrates the parts in their heart, redefining them in their specificities" (Ortiz 47).

In the final chapter, I turn to the diaspora and its nonconformist discourses that complicate traditional forms of thinking culture and politics in the Dominican Republic. The first part of the chapter consists of an exegesis of Silvio Torres-Saillant's essays, in which I observe an important critical maneuver that consists of the denunciation and dismantling of the nationalist mythology that serves as the hermeneutic stage for all discussions on dominicanidad. Yet, even though his work opens an important breach in the debate on Dominican identity by introducing the perspective of diversity, his discourse continues to be indebted to the same hegemonic norm that it proposes to subvert. I argue that it is the literature of the diaspora that offers an escape from the conceptual limitations of intellectual discourse, particularly the epistemological dilemma of how to theorize dominicanidad without granting it metaphysical status. I support this argument with an analysis of How the García Girls Lost Their Accent (1991) by Julia Álvarez and Dominicanish (2000) by Josefina Báez. These texts are emblematic of the ludic character of a number of literary works from the diaspora and the island. Diasporic Dominican narrative is founded on the construction of an imaginary geography that allows for the articulation of the exilic subject. Thus, the possibility of a national, exogenous model of identity becomes visible: a model that takes root outside of the island

and that responds to a particular context rather than to atavistic factors (like the cult of the fatherland or the epic origins of the nation and commemorative events).

Chapter 1 The Spaces of the Dominican Nation

In the recent cultural history of the Dominican Republic, there is perhaps no other public figure that has been more influential or has enjoyed more visibility than Joaquín Balaguer. With a short interregnum of two four-yearperiods from 1978 to 1986, he was president six times following the precarious reestablishment of the democratic order after Trujillo's death, the civil war of 1965 and the second invasion by the US marines. In total, Balaguer controlled the destiny of the Dominican Republic for 22 years after becoming president in 1966. The extent of his influence puzzles scholars and observers of modern Dominican history. In the political sphere, for example, all of his opponents courted or flattered him in some way and to such an extent that even when he did not occupy the first magistracy of the state, Balaguer acted as an advisory to those who did. Those in power used to pay him regular visits prior to taking important decisions on the administration of the country. Even when he was already in his nineties, his aura of being indispensable continued to exceed the realm of politics, extending into the cultural domain and thus affecting literary and intellectual discourse. The critical overvaluation of every text ever published by Balaguer, as well as the solemnity and stoicism with which his most minute pronouncements were obeyed, point towards the survival of a strident paternalistic rhetoric. This rhetoric has deep historical roots that nourish its exceptional longevity.1

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¹ One dramatic example of the continuity of paternalism can be observed in the polemic unleashed when an award that had been given to Viriato Sención was subsequently revoked. Sención had received the *Premio Nacional de Novela* in 1993 for his novel *Los que falsificaron la firma de Dios.* However, the text offers a critical perspective on Balaguer through the

Balaguer entered the political bullring in 1930 as part of the campaign team of Trujillo, who was then the presidential candidate. Once the dictatorship had been established, Balaguer rapidly incorporated himself into it and would not renounce his collaborationism for the next three decades during which the authoritarian regime dominated the political scene. Balaguer served the dictator faithfully, as panegyrist, as Secretary of State, ambassador, lawyer in moments of international crisis, vice-president and even "puppet president" in 1960. Nevertheless, maybe the most important role played by Balaguer within the edifice of power was his active participation in what Andrés L. Mateo calls "theoretical Trujillismo" (Mito 56). Mateo here alludes to those intellectuals who exerted a concrete epistemological power due to their position within the state mechanism: they designed and accurately transmitted the ideology of the regime. In fact, the dictatorship owed its longevity not only to repression but also to this "production of ideas" (Mito 93). When one examines the importance of intellectual labor for the cohesion of the totalitarian system, certain figures stand out above the choir of panegyrists due to the force of their rhetoric that linked flattery with pre-existing ideas on the making of the nation that had been forged in the previous century. Mateo turns to the archetypal category of "discourse" to describe the work of the intellectual collaborationist elite:

> "Discourse" infuses the creativity of the intellectual who, using a common source, excels through his profound and extensive education and because he

character of Dr. Mario Ramos. In an unprecedented course of action, the Secretary of State stripped Sención of the prize he had awarded to him only weeks before. This happened when Balaguer was president for the fifth time.

identifies in the *Trujillista* State concerns and ideas about the issue of the nation that pre-exist the absolute power of *Trujillismo*. (*Mito* 101-102)

Balaguer was part of this stratum of *Trujillista* intellectuals. In fact, it was his connection with the space where *Trujillista* ideology was forged that allowed him to set himself up as its continuation after the tyrant's death. The *ethos* of *Trujillismo* was prolonged through Balaguer's political and intellectual practice from 1966 onwards. As a result, the movement towards democratic change that one might have hoped for in this situation did not materialize. Only after the twelve-year period of Balaguer's presidency had come to an end in 1978 was it partially realized. This delay was due to Balaguer's repetition of Trujillo's authoritarian and *neopatrimonialist* style of government.²

One could argue that Balaguer's place in the cultural logic of the contemporary Dominican Republic is comparable to that of a fulcrum in which the dominant model of the national is condensed. In other words, the prominence of Balaguer points to the continuity of a discourse that has remained practically unaltered as a fundamental rhetorical matrix since Dominican independence (even if this discourse takes on different nuances at different moments in history). In this interpretation, the figure of Balaguer functions as one of the links in a language game that had acquired hegemonic status with the thinking of Manuel de Jesús Galván, but that

² Jonathan Hartlyn studied the survival of this pattern of government over the course of modern Dominican history. As he outlines in *The Struggle for Democratic Politics in the Dominican Republic, neopatrimonialism* (in political science) derives from Max Weber's understanding of a type of government defined by the concept's root. For Weber, *patrimonialism* suggests a form of domination that is rooted in traditional authority. The latter confers direct and absolute control over all public matters to the sovereign (14).

did not reach its theoretical culmination until the years of the Trujillo dictatorship.

The trajectory of this dominant body of thought can be traced back to the formation of the Dominican state in 1844 and the political context that enabled it. Broadly speaking, mid-nineteenth-century discourse on the nation was a response to the Haitian invasion of 1821. It was shaped by the idea of a Creole Reconquista, which blinded the imagination of the contemporary intelligentsia. Before the invasion in 1821, Spanish Santo Domingo had acquired independence from the metropolis as a consequence of the political instability of a Spain weakened by the proindependence conflicts that had devastated her former empire on the American continent. Led by José Núñez de Cáceres, the separatists in Santo Domingo fought for incorporation into the Greater Colombia advocated by Bolívar, as well as for the continuity of slavery. This generated an atmosphere of instability, of which the Haitian government was able to take advantage. The so-called Ephemeral Independence of 1821 was thus followed by the unification of the island under the flag of the Haitian Republic for the subsequent twenty-two years. This situation fostered a Hispanophile and racist nationalism amongst the inhabitants of the Spanish-speaking part of the island.

Despite the fact that the project to secede from Haiti was devised by liberal strategists who relied on the participation of *mulatos* and Blacks, the leadership of the nascent Dominican Republic would, due to some last minute alliances, remain in the hands of an elite made up of the conservative sectors. This conservative minority group was mainly focused on defining the contours of a nation that would be Hispanophile and Catholic in character and opposed to the supposed "barbarism" of the Haitian state. As Frank Moya Pons highlights, this contradictory dynamic was not only due to the fact that Dominican independence had

been achieved by means of armed struggle against the Republic of Haiti, but was also to the fact that attacks by the Haitian army continued to constitute a serious threat to the security of the new state even after 1844 (Manual 295-297). This situation allowed the ruling oligarchy to institute a Europeanizing discourse of the nation, which continues to enthrall the imaginary of the vast majority of Dominicans. In other words, like in the rest of Spanish America, the plinth of the discursive edifice of the Dominican nation was constructed by the nineteenth-century intelligentsia. As Ángel Rama emphasizes in The Lettered City, the writers of the postindependence period may be seen as a prolongation of the "letrado" of the colonial period; they were "intellectual producers who elaborate (rather than merely transmitting) ideological messages;" they were "the designers of cultural models raised up for public conformity." Their role as new letrados made them servants to state power as well as holders of the power inherent in the "symbolic languages" (22).

In Dominican history, there is no one who incorporates the idea of the letrado better than Manuel de Jesús Galván. He is one of the most contradictory historical figures of the nineteenth century and served as the foremost advocate for the pro-annexation movement that sought to return the country to the rule of Spain (a country that in March 1861 was convulsed by political instability). In his articles for the daily newspaper *La Razón*, he celebrated the advantages of returning into the tutelage of the former metropolis. As he declares in an article published June 17 of that year:

...we cannot fathom, we repeat, how it could be that the country wins materially with annexation without also winning politically and morally. [...] The true stage of annexation – the only one, the logical one, the reasonable one – is when you see, on

the one side, a loyal, valiant and disgraced people (comparable to a child taken away from the caresses of the mother by deceitful gypsies) turning back one day towards the mother in search for a better fate; and, on the other side, Spain - always generous and always great - recognizing with jubilation the son whom she had lost and thus increasing the big Spanish family, making a gigantic step forward in the esteem of other nations through providence, reestablishing the respect her name commands in these seas and setting out on the path towards recuperating the influence she deserves as discoverer and settler. Consequently, annexation is completely elevated and noble; those who do not see it this way are blind, those who see it this way but do the contrary would deserve to be blind. ("Diversas fases" 437-438)

Much later, in the last decade of the nineteenth century and long after Dominican national sovereignty had been regained in 1865 through the so-called "War of Restoration," Galván reappears on the political scene as a diplomat in Washington. In his function as "Enviado Extraordinario y Ministro Plenipotenciario," he contributed to the negotiations of Ulises Heureaux's government to lease the strategically important peninsula of Samaná to the United States.

However, Galván is better known as the author of *Enriquillo*. Published in 1882, this "foundational fiction," in Doris Sommer's words, inserts itself into the tradition of the historical epic, seeking to articulate a vision of a supposed national essence, which in this case is centered exclusively on the combination of Hispanic values and the Taino legacy. The novel narrates the story of Guarocuya, a Taino cacique who headed an insurrection against the army of Charles V in the mountains in the South-East of Hispaniola. After three years

of fruitless fighting and as part of their peace negotiations in 1519, the emperor guaranteed Guarocuya and his followers their liberty. Galván's novel extols the figure of the cacique, endowing him with the physical and mental attributes of a hero of the European tradition. For instance, Guarocuya has a Christian education (in the text, his name "Enriquillo" was given to him by the Franciscan monks who raised him) and possesses all the virtues traditionally attributed to the nobility. At the end of the novel, these attributes create the illusion of a Dominican "race" – la raza dominicana – that is supposedly the product of a beneficial racial mixing of the Spanish and indigenous peoples. However, by representing the integration of the aboriginal and the European peoples without taking into account those of African origin, Galván discursively deceives the reader and distorts the ethno-racial composition of sixteenth-century Hispaniola. One of the main effects of such a falsification can still be seen today in Dominican cultural nationalism.³ Social scientists such as Franklin Franco have emphasized the way in which Enriquillo has contributed to the consolidation of a pro-Hispanic discourse in the discussion on Dominican identity:

One has to acknowledge that *Enriquillo* fulfilled an excellent and functional role for the oligarchy as one of the texts that in conjunction with many other works of the same orientation became obligatory reading in official schooling. It helped to reinstate the

³ The celebratory national discourse of *mestizaje* that evokes the racial mixing between the Iberian and the indigenous components is an ideological phenomenon found in quite a few Spanish-American countries. As Andrés Serbin explains: "the dominant oligarchies and elites of the Latin American societies have integrated Ibero-American *mestizaje* as a legitimating element within the national ideologies, in some cases with a strong emphasis on the American or indigenous dimension like in Mexico or Peru today but readily ignore the African dimension" (265).

pro-Hispanic orientation that for centuries and centuries we used to – and continue to – suffer from [...]. In the cultural history of our people, there is not a single feature that has not been the victim of a tendentious, antinational manipulation by pro-Hispanic oligarchic thought. (85)

The obsessive attachment of Dominican nationalist discourse to a "fictitious ethnicity" is mirrored in the novel's underlying political project. To give an example, suffice it to point out that the only mention of an African presence in the 466 pages of *Enriquillo* appears in one of the text's abundant footnotes, in which the author praises the cacique's tactics of evasion in the mountains by alluding to the fact that groups of black maroon slaves would use the same strategy later on in colonial history:

Guaroa's intention was not absurd. In 1860, three *BIEMBIENES* [sic] [mythic savage beings living in the mountains] were captured. They belonged to a tribe of savages of the African race, which still exists in the mountains of Bahoruco. Only lost hunters bring back incoherent and belated news about this tribe. (51)

With this peculiar mention of the "three Blacks," Galván misrepresents the ethno-racial make-up of Dominican reality.

⁴ The concept of "fictitious ethnicity" was coined by Etienne Balibar in reference to the arbitrary character of the type of social cohesion furthered by the political formula of the nation-state. In the words of Balibar: "No nation possesses an ethnic base in a natural way, but rather, as social nuclei are nationalised and populations integrated, divided or dominated by them, this social nuclei turn "ethnic," that is to say, they end up being represented in the past or in the future *as if* they formed a natural community, that possesses an original identity, culture and interests that transcend individual and social conditions" (96).

In fact, by 1860, mulatos and Blacks constituted the vast majority of the young Republic's population.⁵ Galván's erasure of the African element from the national epic lends weight to an identity forged through the negation of that component. The construction of this identity had been begun in the Independence period in response to Haitian attempts at re-occupation. Yet, as Elka Scheker points out, "the curious thing is that this self-affirmation was only felt to be necessary vis-à-vis Haiti, since the first act of the Dominicans in their independent life was to seek annexation to Spain in 1861, and subsequently to try to sell part of their territory to France and to the United States," which "demonstrates the inherent contradictions of the concept of the Dominican national identity" (22). As we have seen, these paradoxes are also present in Enriquillo. Dominicans founded their identity as a people on the negation of the African heritage, on their pro-Hispanic sentiment and on their Catholicism, elements that are granted a lot of space in the novel. This particular way to narrate the nation has survived almost untainted until this day. The ideological foundation of this narrative is a conception of Haiti as a space of non-grata otherness that is necessary to ensure the cohesion of Dominican identity.

Homi Bhabha's description of the "temporal ambivalence" found in articulations of the modern nation may help to explain the survival and dominance of this version of national history. The latter is anchored in foundational historical events that it posits as its permanent origin. At the same time, it appeals to the transitoriness of the present for its legitimization, thus revealing a tension between

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⁵ On the African presence on the island see the study by Hugo Tolentino Dipp entitled Raza e historia en Santo Domingo: los orígenes del prejuicio racial en América. Santo Domingo: Fundación Cultural Dominicana, 1992; see also Franklin J. Franco's Los negros, los mulatos y la nación dominicana. Santo Domingo: Nacional, 1989; and Carlos Andújar's La presencia negra en Santo Domingo: un enfoque etnohistórico. Santo Domingo: Búho, 1997.

the historico-pedagogical and the performative (*The Location of Culture* 297). In fact, at the symbolic level, national rhetoric needs this impulse towards, and affirmation of, origin (understood as a common past shared by the collectivity). However, it also requires a performative reinscription of this mythic history by the nation's subjects in the context of everyday life. The effect of this is a circular dynamic that necessitates a constant return to the beginnings of the nation to prevent its possible erasure.

The emphasis I place on Enriquillo as an allegory for the history of the foundation of the Dominican Republic in the nineteenth century would be meaningless if the idea of the nation it proposes were exceptional. However, Enriquillo was not the first text to typify this vision of national identity. To take an earlier example, the poem "Anacaona" by Salomé Ureña published in 1880 also evokes the combination of Spanish and Taino elements in its imagining of a national identity. Written before Enriquillo, "Anacaona" narrates the story of an indigenous queen of the same name who, along with all her subjects, is assassinated by the Spanish governor Nicolás de Ovando in 1513 in the chieftainship [cacicazgo] of Jaragua or Xaraguá, the "kernel or marrow, or court of all that island," according to the account of the massacre by Bartolomé de las Casas in Brevisima relación de la destruyción de las Indias (14). However, in the poem, the responsibility for the slaughter of the inhabitants of Jaragua falls exclusively on Ovando and his henchmen, exempting from blame the rest of the Spanish conquistadors, despite the fact that the latter had exterminated the indigenous population of Hispaniola by the second decade of the sixteenth century. In the text of Ureña, Christopher Columbus is a figure who serves to embody a noble, Christian and just Spain, extolled in the poem as an integral part of the Dominican nation:

Sobre comarcas en ruina dominan los extranjeros, roto ya, de sus pasiones desordenadas, el freno; que si pudo generoso de Colón el noble pecho alguna vez poner dique a criminales intentos, la calumnia y la perfidia se convocaron de acuerdo para ultrajar su alta gloria y conducirlo entre hierros de su Quisqueya querida

allá distante, muy lejos. De entonces cual nunca libre el crimen alzó su imperio. (316, my emphasis)

Over the ruined lands dominate the foreigners, the brake of their messy passions already broken. If only generous Columbus's noble chest could have put a dam to criminal intentions. Slander and treachery conspired to offend his great glory and to lead him in chains away from his beloved Quisqueya far away into the distance. From that point, as if he had never been free, crime established its empire.]

Silvio Torres-Saillant sees in this positive treatment of the Spanish a manifestation of the latent Hispanophilia characteristic of the intelligentsia's vision of the nation:

As a *mulata* who was part of the intellectual Dominican elite in the nineteenth century, Ureña de Henríquez naturally felt loyal to the Spanish heritage (of which her country was so proud), and would thus not present the slaughter in a way that would appear consonant with colonization itself. Her text, then, represents the death of Anacaona and her court as the product of the evil nature of Ovando and his allies. The poem represents them in such a way that it leaves the "nobility" of the Admiral's

spirit intact, even though by the time of the slaughter Columbus's violence had wreaked havoc. ("La traición," 27)

In this way, Salomé Ureña's poem narratively constructs a homogenous Dominicanness that is heir to the cultural tradition of Spain and to a vaguely defined indigenous component. The same approach is also present in the work of Pedro Henríquez Ureña, her most famous son, who in La cultura y las letras coloniales en Santo Domingo (1936) goes to the extreme of claiming the writings of Columbus as the first national Dominican manifestation of literature: а "Columbus's diary contains the pages that rightfully open our literary history, the praise of our island" (338). Just over two decades later, Henríquez Ureña's assertion becomes the focal point of Colón, precursor literario, a text by Joaquín Balaguer published in 1958. In Colón, Balaguer repeats and develops this thesis over the course of 148 pages without mentioning Henríquez Ureña's name a single time. The first paragraph of this work informs us of the following: "The history of Dominican literature begins with the name of Columbus, with his maritime diary and his letters, with the first descriptions of the island's natural environment. Like no one else, he knew how to feel and to express the charm of the national landscape and even to transmit to us a vision that was poetic and at times exceedingly literary" (7). These examples are paradigmatic of the body of knowledge that has, in an exclusive manner, shaped the political and cultural identity of the Dominican nation for almost one hundred and fifty years. Its extraordinary longevity can in part be attributed to its incorporation into the state mechanism. Elevated to the status of official history, it permitted the constructive alignment of political and cultural power. One might propose that this conjunction functions in the same way as the Derridean archive. The latter refers to an epistemological space

that holds a given body of knowledge and its persistence stems from its ability to occupy two functions: it is at once law and origin. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida starts his exploration of this concept with the etymology of the word "archive:"

Arkhé, we recall, names at once the commencement and the commandment. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence – physical, historical, or ontological principle – but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given – nomological principle. (Archive Fever 1)

The archive, then, designates an epistemological space that needs to be preserved because it functions as origin and source of the law. Guarding the archive bestows upon those who venture to undertake such a task the capacity to interpret the signs that it displays:

As is the case for the Latin archivum or archium [...], The meaning of "archive", its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek arkheion: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that place which is their house (private house, family house or employee's house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate.

They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. (Archive Fever 2)

The definition highlights the successful link between location and ideology, converging in a space of privilege at once physical and immaterial. Yet it is the joining of archontic power to the power of consignation (the gathering together of signs) that effectively disables the individual to evade the archive's sphere of influences. The power of consignation organizes the archive as a single seamless corpus. In it, "there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or secret which could separate (secernere), or partition, in an absolute manner" (3).

To bring this argument back to the Dominican context, the guardians of the archive of Dominican nationalism are positioned in the dominant sector of the intellectual class and are responsible for the perpetuation of a body of knowledge that spreads a lie. Its most serious and obvious mis-representation relates to the way in which Dominicans become subjects when they are "interpellated" by this ideology. They are interpellated as "Hispanic-Taino" Dominicans despite the fact that, culturally and ethnically, the vast majority would be more accurately described as possessing African and Hispanic origins. In collaboration with the pro-government intellectuals, Trujillo's dictatorship (1930-1961) intensified the nature and extent of the Eurocentric vision of the nation and elevated it to the status

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⁶ Louis Althusser has described this process of interpellation present in every ideology in the following terms: [...] ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that "it recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or "transforms" the individual into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!" (48).

of archive. Headed by Manuel Arturo Peña Batlle, Max Henríquez Ureña, Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi and Joaquín Balaguer, the collaborationist intelligentsia took the vision of a Spanish and Taino Dominicanness to unexpected levels of manipulation. Its echoes still resound in the Santo Domingo of the third millennium. The theorists of *Trujillismo* consolidated this identitarian discourse and gave it its most accomplished form. Borrowing from Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's interpretation of Spanish reality under the regime of Franco, I would like to call this archive of the nation the "*Trujillista* city."

The Trujillista city

In 1936, the Dominican capital changed its name. The name of "Santo Domingo de Guzmán" that the city had held since the time of its foundation by Nicolás de Ovando in 1502 was exchanged for "Ciudad Trujillo" in one of the most dramatic acts of adulation of the time. At this moment in history, the figure of Trujillo experienced an unprecedented transformation in popular mythology as a result of the reconstruction of the country after the disaster caused by the cyclone San Zenón, which had destroyed almost the entire city of Santo Domingo in 1930. The contingency of this natural phenomenon allowed Trujillo to change the negative

⁷ Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. La literatura en la construcción de la ciudad democrática. Barcelona: Crítica, 1998.

⁸ The idea to name the Dominican capital Ciudad Trujillo came up in 1935 at the request of the senator Mario Fermín Cabral. This gesture has arguably only been surpassed in obsequiousness by the famous slogan "God and Trujillo" devised by Jacinto Peynado. Balaguer defended the latter in his acceptance speech when he entered the *Academia Dominicana de la Lengua*. This speech, entitled "God and Trujillo" is reprinted in *La Era de Trujillo*. Ed. Abelardo Nanita. Ciudad Trujillo: Impresora Dominicana, 1955. 52-61.

image of him as it was being forged in various sectors of society (especially in the traditional oligarchy) in response to his repressive and centralizing exercise of government. The reconstruction of the capital city according to the parameters of a monumentalist urbanism, however, rapidly improved his image. This transformation was most pronounced amongst the urban popular classes, who were relocated to new areas in the periphery of the capital and captivated by the legitimization of his position in the urban reconfiguration.

During this reconfiguration of the topography of the capital city, Trujillo managed to keep apart those social sectors that could represent a threat (such as the traditional oligarchy) or an obstacle (such as the peasantry) to his absolute control over the Dominican state. In one of the most incisive and bold analyses of this topic, Lauren Derby notes the complex nature of the reconstruction of the capital by the *Trujillista* regime:

The story of the devastation and rebuilding of the capital displays the regime's peculiar combination of populism and political exclusion, of nationalist communion and static hierarchy. Most importantly, the cyclone was a seminal moment since it became, in official propaganda, the founding myth of origin of the Era of Trujillo, the origin of national time, and the ever-present chaos of "before" held up to contrast with the modernity of Trujillo's civilizing mission. The post-hurricane capital was the tabula rasa upon which Trujillo's project to reshape society was first enacted, becoming a model "modernist city," as well as the metonym of the nation, and of Trujillo himself. (1998: 150)

Trujillo's power was consolidated in practically all aspects of national reality and the reconfiguration of the city's physical space thus entailed a new social ordering. Ciudad Trujillo came to represent the summit of a new political order as well as, even more importantly, the dominance and intensification of a symbolic order that had gradually transformed itself into archive following the foundation of the state.

Arguably, Trujillismo as an ideology constituted a type of fascism. Yet, this interpretation of the regime's political constitution has been subject to some debate. One the most renowned participants in this debate is Robert D. Crassweller, who believes that even though Trujillo had begun as "a strong man, a caudillo in the historic pattern," he "would never become a totalitarian leader in the sense that the term has been applied to Hitler and Stalin and their movements, for neither he nor the regime would ever experience that total ideology, with its many sociological immersion in consequences, that was the raison d'être of the great continental tyrannies" (118). In contrast to Crassweller, I believe that Trujillismo did contain some of the elements that are constitutive of fascism. One of the most defined was the control exercised by the Partido Dominicano, the political arm of the dictatorship. Its members became indispensable consultants for any administrative decision, not only in the realm of politics but, more generally, in all public matters. As Derby writes:

> Trujillo financed an enormous horizontal expansion of government through the creation of the official Dominican Party, a process that did more than merely redistribute political capital in the form of

⁹ Among the fascist elements of *Trujillista* ideology are its centralism, the personality cult surrounding the leader, *caudillismo*, traditionalism and the liturgical character of its public political performances. These aspects were condensed in the idea of the nation as a large family, in which its subjects could find the most "perfect" form of social integration, an idea not devoid of a messianic undertone.

state's jobs and enforce the regime's structure of domination. Founded in 1931, the party quickly became the prime nexus of articulation between the state and the political subject, with a mass membership of approximately one-half of the country's population. It provided a mass base to a regime that at the onset did not receive support from the traditional elite. From the perspective of party membership populace, synonymous with citizenship itself, since the party card (called the palmita for the party's palm tree symbol) was fundamental for access to everything from jobs to bus services, in combination with the cédula (official ID) and the voter's registration. (These three pieces of identification in tandem were nicknames los tres golpes, "the three blows"). As an extension of Trujillo's person, the party coordinated and planned civic rituals, conducted "civic reviews" (revistas cívicas), and dispensed official charity in his name so as to, in his own words, "respond to the urgent need to create a citizen consciousness submissive to the principle of authority." (2009: 120)

The Partido Dominicano and its various cultural sub-groups also provided the space for the collaborationist elite to forge the regime's ideology. This was the case of the influential Acción Democrática, a group headed by Manuel Arturo Peña Batlle. According to Diógenes Céspedes, "similarly to fascist or Nazi syndicates, Acción Cultural reconciled the different political interests of these intellectuals with the project of Trujillismo" (1994: 36). The Partido Dominicano also facilitated the creation of a new dominant social class and displaced the traditional oligarchy that had descended from the patrician families, the founders of the Dominican State. This new lettered

aristocracy acted as a link between the leadership and the rest of Dominican society.

Under Trujillismo, the national project was founded on the glorification of the "spirit" of the regime. As I have pointed out before, Trujillista ideology was perpetuated through the "interpellation" of individuals as contributors to a superior ideology (based on the Hispanic-Taino legacy) supposedly shared by all of society. In this conception of the nation, subjects are united in a single social body and the governor - the only one capable of conferring sense to the social whole – is in charge of its management. Trujillo thus symbolically became the creator of the "body" of the Dominican nation. To illustrate this, a good number of examples can be found in the pronouncements of his collaborators, ideologues and symbolic heirs. See for instance this excerpt from Balaguer's Memorias: "[Trujillo] possessed the passion of an organizer, who established order when faced with chaos and who set up the foundations on which the modern state in the Dominican Republic is built' (108).

Combined with the intensification of nationalist sentiment (fuelled by anti-Haitian racism and Hispanophilia), the celebratory discourse on the modernizing impulse of Trujillo's political operations culminated in the solidification and institutionalization of the rhetoric on national identity. One glance at the multiple names for the dictator that formed part of *Trujillismo*'s epistemic devices will suffice to demonstrate that the feeling of belonging to the nation was complementary to *Trujillista* ideology. Legitimated by the unconditional support of the majority of those intellectuals who had not gone into exile, Trujillo was celebrated as the "Leader," "Benefactor of the Homeland," "Hero of National Culture" and "Father of the New Homeland." All of these epithets were designed to consolidate the image of the *Trujillato* as a *tabula rasa* in national history, as a break with

obscurantism and barbarism and as synonymous with the access to the benefits of modernity.

Homi Bhabha argues that the "prosthesic" character of the construction of masculinity can be compared to a similar formative dynamic in the construction of the idea of the nation. Bhabha explains the way in which nationalisms tend to naturalize the feeling of wanting to serve the fatherland and those who govern it:

The arbiter of this nationalist/naturalist ethic is the bearer of a peculiar, visible invisibility (some call it the phallus) – the familial patriarch. The position must be understood as an enunciative site – rather than an identity – whose identificatory axes can be gendered in a range of strategic ways. The instinct for respect – central to the civic responsibility for the service of nation-building – comes from the Father's sternness, which is an effect of his "peripheral" position in the family. ("Are you a Man or a Mouse?" 59)

The gendered and patriarchal technology of *Trujillismo* functioned according to equivalent parameters and its successful colonization of subjectivities can be pinpointed in the profoundly patriarchal nature of Dominican identity and society, as well as in representations of Trujillo.

For three decades, the *Trujillista* city prescribed "new molds" (Peña Batlle, *Política* 37) for the performance of Dominican identity. To achieve its goal, it turned to a variety of symbolic strategies. One of the most effective of these consisted in the combination of political power and official culture. Once the political project of the dictator and the narration of national history had joined forces, individuals were not only "subjected" by the ruling ideological apparatus but had also become "subjects." This dominant system

reinforced the exaltation of national discourse (which I have previously identified with the archive) or "the law of what can be said," in the words of Michel Foucault (*Archaeology* 145). In fact, due to its overall uniformity, one can analyze the effectiveness of this discursive practice in *archaeological* terms, using the methodology employed by the French thinker in his examination of scientific Western discourse.

In Foucauldian terms, archaeology is understood not in its traditional sense (as an activity involving the meticulous interpretation of ancient objects and their latent purposes), but as the exhaustive examination of various discourses that make up a given system of knowledge:

Archaeology tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules. It does not treat discourse as a document, as a sign of something else, as an element that ought to be transparent, but whose unfortunate opacity must often be pierced if one is to reach at last the depth of the essential in the place in which it is held reserve; it is concerned with discourse in its own volume, as a monument. (Archaeology of Knowledge 155)

On the rhetorical level, the theory of the national that dominates the debate on identity in the Dominican Republic exhibits the characteristics of a monumentalist system of knowledge such as that theorized by Foucault, since it constitutes "a complex, articulated, describable group of transformations" (*Archaelogy* 195).

The most extreme archons of this system of knowledge were the letrados of *Trujillismo*. But even amongst these unconditional supporters, one can make some

distinctions. Under the aegis of Trujillo, Peña Batlle and Balaguer were the most important defenders of the nation's archive. More than any other letrados of the time, they praised the works and the trajectory of the "Era" even in its most despicable aspects, embracing of course also the glorification of hispanidad in the definition of Dominican national identity. Once the ideological make-up of the Trujillista city had been entrusted to intellectual government officials such as Peña Batlle and Balaguer, this pro-Hispanic disposition came to dominate the debate on dominicanidad, taking the doctrinarian elements to an unprecedented level. As leaders of a new politico-cultural elite that had emerged under the protection of the dictatorship, Peña Batlle and Balaguer theorized the inclusion of the people in a national project driven by the state. The formerly hegemonic sector – the traditional oligarchy - was left outside of the symbolic boundaries of the Trujillista city, but the archive of the nation that had been designed by the nineteenth-century patrician intelligentsia was kept in place and reinforced in its key aspects. It acquired a pro-government character from the moment of Trujillo's ascent to power in 1930. In other words, the control that the patrician class had held over the interpretation and continuity of the archive was transferred to the new guardians who brought about the violent homogenization of the political body of the Dominican Republic and its members. Appealing to the incorporation of the marginalized mass and following a paternalist pattern, the hegemonic culture of the Trujillista city capitalized on its privileged position to control the loyalties that arose from a sense of belonging. In "La Patria Nueva," a text included in the volume of speeches and lectures delivered and published in 1954 under the title *Politica* de Trujillo, Peña Batlle (in his role as representative of the dictator) stresses the effects of this new disposition of symbolic power as he explains the topography of national identity:

We believe firmly that there is a new sense of the Fatherland amongst the Dominicans. We believe that it is Trujillo who is responsible for this new political stance amongst Dominicans, but we also believe that the essence and root of the magnificent construction lies in the immaterial world of the thought and the feelings of our masses. What has been transformed amongst us is the community's way of living, the way of thinking, and the way of feeling as a national expression. What Trujillo has changed substantially is the political constitution of the Republic, not in its external ways (formal and written), but in its essential content, in its intimate, living – and, if you want, biological – constitution. (107-108)

In this excerpt with obvious overtones of Miguel de Unamuno's thinking on history, Peña Batlle sees the period of Trujillo as the moment when dominicanidad defines itself again as it used to in the past, namely through its true Hispanic essence, a sort of "intra-history" in Unamuno's terms. This revalorization constitutes one of the fundamental tasks of the modernizing project of the regime. This way of thinking helped enormously in the consolidation of Trujillismo as an ideology, and even made it possible that forty years after the physical disappearance of the tyrant dominicanidad is still theorized following this rhetorical mold. This epistemological continuity is obvious in the works of Balaguer and Manuel Núñez, who - like Peña Batlle decades before them disseminate the pedagogy of the Trujillista city from their position as intellectuals. In the next chapter, I will show how this particular narrative of the nation is institutionalized. This discussion will serve as the background for my analysis of the theoretical and literary production that over the last thirty

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years has cast doubt upon the validity of this stagnant theory of *dominicanidad*.

Chapter 2 The *Trujillista* City and its Archons

De la efemérides lo que sigue insistiendo es lo efímero. [What remains of commemorations is the ephemeral.]

La raza cómica, Rubén Ríos Ávila. 10

The XII Forum of the Ministers of Culture from Latin America and the Caribbean (XII Foro de Ministros de Cultura de América Latina y el Caribe) took place in the Dominican Republic at the end of March 2001. As the host of the event, the poet Tony Raful, who was the first Minister of Culture in Dominican history, felt that it was his duty to ensure that the history of the nation would continue to be told according to the blueprint created by the nineteenthcentury intelligentsia. Anointed by public enthusiasm, the minister declared that the Haitian occupation from 1822 to 1844 had aimed to "wipe us out as a separate community and to destroy the characteristics of our existence as a nation" (quoted by Mena 9E). Raful's words to his Latin American fellow Ministers of Culture - including of course the representative of the Republic of Haiti - demonstrate the survival of a homogenous vision of Dominican national identity. The characteristics of this preeminent body of knowledge can be found with relative ease not only in political culture, but also in the educational system, the media and intellectual discourse in general. As the Puerto Rican historian Pedro San Miguel writes in La isla imaginada: historia, identidad y utopía en La Española (1997), the letrados of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century immersed themselves in a "recuperation of sixteenth-century history as a 'fall,' that is to say, as the loss of 'paradise' or as

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¹⁰ Rubén Ríos Ávila. La raza cómica del sujeto en Puerto Rico. San Juan: Callejón, 2001. 16.

the decadence of a 'golden age" (44). It is in Idea del valor de la Isla Española y utilidades que de ella puede sacar su monarquía (1785) by Antonio Sánchez Valverde that San Miguel sees the first manifestation of this current of politically committed thought that articulates a fatalist vision of Dominican history, a rhetoric of disaster, in other words. According to this peculiar framing of national history, the magnificence of Santo Domingo as the centre of the colonialist enterprise in America enabled the establishment of the foundations of a criollo culture of Hispanic stock. Its development was later eclipsed by "bad" metropolitan policies towards the island, so Sánchez Valverde writes. The disappearance of the Taino population at the end of the sixteenth century, the gradual collapse of the slavery system and the impoverishment and subsequent exodus of a good part of the island's elite further contributed to the destruction of this criollo culture. Despite the work of intellectuals who did not adhere to this narration of the nation,11 the fatalist vision of history prevailed in Dominican thought. Consequently, the intelligentsia of the beginning of the twentieth century championed "the emergence of a strong and centralized state, capable of validating national sovereignty, of propelling economic progress and of imposing a civilizing program" (San Miguel 45). Thus, it paved the way for the emergence and legitimation of the Trujillista city.

The work of Peña Batlle constitutes perhaps the most coherent articulation of the theoretical assumptions of this

¹¹ Pedro F. Bonó (1828-1906), who witnessed the emergence of a nationstate halfway through the nineteenth century, opted for a history of the homeland that claims the *mestizaje* of Spanish and African peoples as a positive feature in the composition of national being. As Pedro San Miguel explains: "with respect to the question of race, Bonó's thinking differs substantially from that of the politicians and letrados of his era. Far from deploring *mestizaje*, Bonó came to consider it as an original element not only of Dominican society, but of the whole of the continent" (82).

symbolic city. Yet, his ideological trajectory shows signs of a curious personal transformation. During the first American invasion (1916-1924), he supported radical nationalism, which advocated the exit of the marines. Later, he briefly adhered to socialist ideology, but in the end he joined the *Partido Dominicano* and begun from there his career as an ideologist and apologist of the Trujillo regime. From the 1940s onwards, Peña Batlle, Balaguer and Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi formed an exclusive intellectual triad committed to the legitimization of the political program of *Trujillismo*. As Ernesto Sagás explains, the work of these letrados in the service of Trujillo "provided the regime with the ideological plinth that the authoritarian and 'sultanic' order of Trujillo needed' (55).

In the prologue to *Política de Trujillo*, Rodríguez Demorizi refers to Peña Batlle as "the most astute and determined interpreter of Trujillo's political ideas" (8). This description by one of the most respected intellectuals of the period emphasizes the importance of Peña Batlle in the ideological configuration of *Trujillismo*. One can analyze his ideal of the nation most accurately in the pro-dictator speeches that he gave from the forties onwards. The speeches point to the two poles around which the archive of the nation was consolidated, namely the relations between Dominicans and Haitians and the recuperation of the indigenous and the Spanish past. ¹² In the theory of *dominicanidad* as advocated by Peña Batlle, "Dominicanness" is defined as a homogenous entity. It purportedly includes the Hispanic and the indigenous components of communal legacy, but given the

¹² The political speeches of Peña Batlle outline the ideas that the author later developed at length in two voluminous historical works: *Historia de la cuestión fronteriza dominico-haitiana* (Ciudad Trujillo: Impresora Dominicana, 1946) and *La rebelión del Bahoruco* (Ciudad Trujillo: Impresora Dominicana, 1948).

almost purely historical nature of the latter after the extermination of the aboriginal population in the sixteenth century, *hispanidad* becomes in fact the dominant element in this articulation of national identity.

Peña Batlle inaugurated a national historiography in which the figure of Trujillo appears as the people's providential guide who molds the nation into its most accomplished form. Previous leaders (Pedro Santana, Buenaventura Báez, Ulises Heureaux, Horacio Vásquez, Federico Velázquez) had merely been "necessary products of this environment, consequences of the way of life, of thought and feeling of the masses from which they had emerged" (112). Trujillo, on the other hand, fulfilled a messianic role, which was described as follows by Peña Batlle in a speech given in the town of Azua in 1942:

I do not hesitate to admit and to proclaim that the spiritual authority of the Dominican community has been tempered in the furnace lit in 1930, until it possessed the hardness of steel [...]. In the personality of Trujillo and in his work, one has always been able to discern the accumulation of transcendental, almost cosmic, forces destined to fulfill the inescapable mandates of national consciousness: Trujillo was born to fulfill an imminent, imponderable destiny that escaped all sentimental prediction. In their historical and social significance, his work and his personality have begun to melt into the roots of our country. (31-32)

Nevertheless, even though for Peña Batlle "the Dominican people found in Trujillo the body of its unity" (197), the historical tensions inherent in the process of national consolidation do of course not legitimate a discourse that presents Trujillo as the "providential" solution. Instead, they

actually reveal Peña Batlle's incompetence as an interpreter of the complexities and ambiguities of the modernity inaugurated with Trujillo.

Peña Batlle's reasoning is that of a Kantian-Hegelian philosophy of history, that is to say, it is based on the idea that the history of humanity traces an infallible progress towards improvement, both in the moral and the material sense. The rhetoric of Peña Batlle concentrates on, and limits itself to, the attempt to demonstrate how the positive and natural development of "civilized" societies was interrupted in the case of the Dominican Republic, supposedly because of the fact that she shares the insular space with a social group marked by the signs of "barbarism." He considers Haitians to pose a real threat to the racial and cultural purity of the Hispanic substratum and to the development of the Dominican nation along the paths of civilization:

There is no benevolent feeling, nor political reason, nor any circumstantial interest that can force us to look indifferently upon the scene of Haitian penetration. The type of Haitian that carries out this penetration cannot be the Haitian of distinction (the one that makes up the social, intellectual and economic elite of the neighboring people). The latter type does not worry us, because he does not create any difficulties for us: this type does not emigrate. The Haitian that bothers us and makes us suspicious is the one that belongs to the lowest social rang on the other side of the border. This type is really undesirable. Clearly of African race, he cannot symbolize for us any ethnic incentive, [...] he is infected with numerous and seminal vices and necessarily handicapped by illness and physiological deficiencies that are endemic at the lower end of that society. (67)

In the same way as his Argentine precursor Domingo F. Sarmiento in *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* (1845), Peña Batlle understands "barbarie" – here represented by Haiti – as a regressive modernity. In his discourse, it functions as a rhetorical device that legitimates the figure of Trujillo as the epitome of the merits of modernity:

With the accurate eye of a statesman, the Generalisimo Trujillo has recognized the alarming geometric the neighboring population's progression of multiplication. Its physiological power is, for several reasons, exceptional [...] he has been able to see the ancestral defects, the primitivism without possible evolution that keeps it in an original, inalterable state, [he has been able to see] the old and negative customs of a large core of our neighbors, the sector that is most often in contact with our centers on the border because of its needs [...] following the eloquent lessons of Haitian thinkers he has understood that the ethnic peculiarities of each people are not reconcilable and has decided to face up to the problem of the survival of each on the island, pursuing the only possible policy: that each should live their lives within the material limits of its possessions, without us being destined to suffer the consequences of the geographical and historical fatality of this dualism that divides the island, which Spain had found one and undivided and which Spain should have transmitted to us one and undivided. (65-66)

The tragic vision that this narrative advances is well suited to the subsequent exaltation of Trujillo as the providential leader destined to bestow order upon the supposed chaos of the Dominican Republic. In this particular interpretation of national history, Trujillo is described not only as the founder of the "third Republic" on the ruins and errors of the two previous ones (proclaimed in 1821 and 1844), but also as the true architect of the "Dominican State:" "We are not presented with a new state that substitutes a previous state in all its functions. Trujillo created, plainly and simply, the Dominican State, the one that the precursors desired and that did not become a reality until the year 1930" (197-198). In other words, Peña Batlle proposes a new national origin - a degree zero of politics – but one that nevertheless continues the narrative of the nation as articulated in the previous century. The trope of a homogenous national identity in danger of contamination is one of the fundamental elements of the Dominican knowledge system, one that Peña Batlle recuperates in his vision of homeland history when extolling the role of Trujillo in the composition of national identity:

No one can make him [Trujillo] or the Dominican people witness with resignation the irreparable contamination of the springs of our national identity by elements that are foreign to its nature and constitution. Let us not forget who we Dominicans are, our Spanish nation of Christians and Catholics, a nation that emerged pure and homogenous in the geographical unit of the island and that would have stayed thus until today had it not been for the scion that from the end of the seventeenth century grafted itself onto the pristine trunk to pollute its sap with agents that are profoundly and inevitably distinct from those that were growing in *Hispaniola* in the beginning. (66)

Peña Batlle here alludes to the supposed threat that hangs over the cultural identity of the inhabitants of Spanish Santo Domingo, as well as to the regime's justification for the use of force in the effort to contain the aberrant tendency in the body of the Dominican nation caused by the contact with a foreign population. What Peña Batlle's assertions leave unsaid becomes clear if one recalls the following extreme measures implemented by the *Trujillista* regime: 1) the massacre of Haitians and Dominican-Haitians ordered by Trujillo in 1937 and 2) the so-called policy of the "dominicanización of the border."

In spite of his eagerness to formulate a cohesive narrative of the nation, Peña Batlle occasionally stumbles over contradictions that arise from his interpretation of the national imaginary as the prolongation of an exclusive – racially and culturally Hispanic – trunk. For instance, in his speech given in Santiago in 1942, Peña Batlle ends up emphasizing the heterogeneity of Dominican national identity precisely when he proposes to stress its oneness:

Dominican democracy had not yet found the cohesive hand and the visionary inspiration necessary to channel its defining ethnic, social and historical elements along the paths of construction. That has been the fundamental work of the *Generalisimo* Trujillo: to offer unity, prominence, and homogeneity to the dispersed and confused characteristics of our national identity. (36)

By recalling the "disperse and confused characteristics" of Dominican national identity in order to emphasize Trujillo's role in uniting them, Peña Batlle highlights precisely what he aspires to hide, namely that this national identity is heterogeneous in nature. Likewise, this statement has the effect of highlighting the "will to falsify" that is present in the system of knowledge of the *Trujillista* city's archive.¹³ During the dictatorship, the alliance between political power and culture guaranteed the continuity of this knowledge system and its definition of Dominican cultural identity. The longevity of this rhetorical mold after the end of the *Trujillato* demonstrates the success of its project of colonizing subjectivities through political culture.

There is another member of the collaborationist intelligentsia one must mention in this context, namely Joaquín Balaguer. His activities helped to disseminate this particular vision of *dominicanidad*. As stated in the previous chapter, in the cultural logic of today's Dominican Republic, Balaguer may still be seen as a fulcrum in which the dominant model of the national is condensed. Suffice it to point out the frequency with which established critics, and especially journalists, portray Balaguer as an intimate expert of

13 It is worth pointing out that the ideological positioning of Peña Batlle coincides with that of other contemporary Caribbean intellectuals, such as the Puerto Rican Antonio S. Pedreira (1899-1939) and the Cuban Jorge Mañach (1898-1961). In his essay Insularismo from 1934, Pedreira postulates the existence of a cultural identity rooted in the supposed preeminence of the Hispanic component over the Taino and African substratum. The Hispanic component thus functions as the crucible that amalgamates these other two constitutive elements of puertorriqueñidad. Of course, for Pedreira, the objective in identifying the specificities of the nation was to establish a clear differentiation from the United States. This is what earlier José E. Rodó and José Vasconcelos had accomplished in Ariel (1900) and La raza cósmica (1925), respectively. Jorge Mañach participates in this current of thought in the Cuban context of the first half of the twentieth century. In La crisis de la alta cultura en Cuba, a lecture given in 1925 to the Sociedad Económica Amigos del País and published as a book the same year, Mañach denounces the apparent lethargy of intellectual production in Cuba and the necessity of a renewal that would protect the essence of cubanidad. For Mañach, the intelligentsia is responsible for the continuity of this "high culture" or "national culture"; the latter is developed thanks to the faith that society shows in the work of intellectuals as creators of the nation's "collective spirit" (23).

dominicanidad and as its most distinguished spokesperson. This type of thought usually generates a certain type of analysis exemplified by the writing of the historian Juan D. Balcácer. The latter argues that for the Dominican Republic the twentieth century is represented by two historical figures: Trujillo and Balaguer. According to Balcácer, they sculpted the outlines of "national consciousness," enabled to do so by their "mythic stature:"

> Our people, as a social conglomeration, has been formed with the inspiration and guidance of certain figures of mythic stature, through the magnitude and permanence of their creations and their influence on national consciousness... As a country we have evolved not by being attentive to the dynamic of social development or to the laws that should govern the construction of society, but rather by obeying the path drawn up by a "caudillo," "chief" or "leader" to whom we always attribute nearly divine qualities that help him resolve the problems that oppress the community. (5)

In Balcácer's interpretation, civil society supposedly lacks the discursive instruments that are necessary for agency. To make up for civil society's inability to express itself, he concedes a carte blanche to Balaguer for the creation of the national imaginary. Thinking through the process of Balaguer's transformation into the spokesperson of the people on a theoretical level, one can postulate that it produces what François Lyotard calls the effect of the discursive "differend:"

> I would like to call a differend [différend] the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim. [...]. A case of differend between two parties takes place when the

"regulation" of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom. [...]. The differend is signaled by this inability to prove. (9-10)

In the Dominican context, Enriquillo Sánchez's article about Balaguer's autobiographical *Memorias de un cortesano en la época de Trujillo* (1988) provides an example of such a "differend":

Balaguer, who is an accomplished teacher, controls the art of silencing as well as the art of narrating [...]. One could say that he has hijacked our collective memory and that he speaks in its name. Our numerous memories consist of privacy without speech. Balaguer speaks for the country. This is his vocation. (35, my emphasis)

According to Sánchez, it is Balaguer's task to imagine the contours of *dominicanidad* since civil society has delegated the "collective memory" to him. In other words, by "speaking for the country," Balaguer holds epistemic power, a power that lies in "putting yourself in the place of the other, saying *I* in his or her place, in neutralizing his or her transcendence" (Lyotard 109). Balaguer's privileged position of enunciation has a silencing effect that enabled him to justify his collaboration with the dictatorship and to survive this period with grace in public opinion. For instance, in *Memorias*, Balaguer talks about the functions he fulfilled within the regime and offers an interpretation of a psychological nature, arguing that a blindness on the moral plane is the product of political interference with human actions:

Does a valid moral doctrine exist for the acts of political life and another one that is very distinct for those of private life? I do not know. But what is certain is that politics blindfolds mankind and many times converts people, unconsciously, into docile instruments of causes that in their most intimate being they reject as incompatible. (107)

The discursive tricks of the quoted excerpt serve to "save" Balaguer's image. The adverb "many times" indicates that the blindness caused by political practice is transitory, that it belongs to specific moments in the personal history of individuals, thus indirectly highlighting the underlying moral integrity of Balaguer as a subject. Likewise, the adverb "unconsciously" transfers the blame to the elusive plane of Freudian categories, doubly concealing Balaguer's own responsibility in this polemical episode of national history. This rhetorical escape through skilful manipulation and the metaphor of blindness has significant consequences on the plane of symbolic violence. These are still manifest in diverse aspects of contemporary Dominican social and cultural reality.

The ethos of *Trujillismo* was carried on in Balaguer's political and intellectual practice, especially when it came to ideas on cultural Dominican identity, which Balaguer himself had helped to mold through his theoretical work during the time of the dictatorship. His intellectual production from this period includes a text of a historical, pseudo-scientific nature, published in 1947 as *La realidad dominicana: semblanza de un país y de un régimen*. It was reedited in 1983 as *La isla al revés: Haití y el destino dominicano*. ¹⁴ The later version is practically identical

¹⁴ Balaguer's interpretation is backed up by an abundance of erudite quotes that attempt to bestow a scientific character upon the text. He does not give dates for a good part of the works on which he bases his approach and many are from before the twentieth century. For instance,

amongst the two most frequently cited texts in La isla al revés are Essai sur

to the original one, except for some additions that attempt to convey the impression that the book is up-to-date. In broad terms, La isla al revés alerts the reader to the gradual danger that the culture of the Dominican Republic faces because of her proximity to Haiti. Balaguer supports this idea by having recourse to the rhetorical invention of a "Haitian race," declaring that the latter presents a real threat to the ethnic composition and the Hispanic essence of Dominican values. In fact, as Fennema and Loewenthal point out, in La isla al revés, "race is origin and consequence of everything that concerns Haiti, from the creation of the nation to contemporary emigration" (220).

One of the postulates that serve as basis for the idea of an endangered national identity is that, ever since Haitian independence, Haitian thought had supposedly represented the island as politically indivisible. In the words of Balaguer: "The birth of the political independence of Haiti was obviously linked to an imperialist ideal: the union of the two parts of the island under the Haitian flag" (11). According to Balaguer, in the twenty-two year period in which the island was in fact unified, the Haitian government tried to "damage the Hispanic bases on which Dominican culture had been built" (14). Once Dominican national independence was achieved in 1844, Haitian imperialism changed tactics, promoting what the author sees as the "peaceful penetration of Dominican territory" (31). In the same way as Peña

l'inegalité des races humaines (1853) by J. A. Gobineau and An Essay on the Principle of Population (1798) by Thomas Malthus.

¹⁵ This idea of "peaceful penetration" is nothing new in the history of Dominican-Haitian relations. Américo Lugo (1870-1952), known chiefly for having been a bitter critic of the American invasion (1916-1924) and later of the dictatorship of Trujillo, wrote the following in 1901: "I do not know how much truth there is to the belief that Haitian politics is perpetually favoring the peaceful invasion of Dominican territory; but I believe that in this respect Haitian politics is as exempt from calculated

Batlle, Balaguer introduces here the idea that the nation's body is contaminated through the illegal entry of Haitians, who settle and form colonies in different places of the national territory (chiefly in the border region). This situation provokes an instability that is no longer of the political but of the "biological" order:

The excess population of Haiti constitutes a growing threat to the Dominican Republic. This is so for a biological reason: Blacks, left to their instincts and without the restraint that a relatively elevated level of life imposes in all countries on reproduction, multiply with a speed almost similar to that of plant life. (36)

Balaguer establishes a relation of cause and effect between the supposed "characteristic fecundity of Blacks" and the "de-nationalization" of the Dominican Republic, referring to diverse aspects, including race, culture, politics, economics and even morality. Amongst the "signs" of this process of denationalization feature: a) the "progressive ethnic decadence of the Dominican population," b) the deterioration of the "morals of the *campesino*" and c) the "disintegrating effect" that the contact with Haiti has had on the feeling of being one people (47-48). As the author summarizes later on in the text: "The clandestine penetration through the borders threatens to disintegrate the moral and ethnic values of the Dominican family" (156).

Catholic traditionalism is one of the vertebrae of the "Dominican family," which Balaguer contrasts with the cultural identity of Haiti. Significantly, Catholicism is

intensions as our own; and that the peaceful invasion is the exclusive work of individual Haitians, who in a smaller portion of territory are expanding, a population that is much more numerous than ours" (202).

associated with a high degree of socio-economic sophistication. At one moment in his essay, Balaguer proposes as "the only solution to the problem" of the Haitian presence in the Dominican Republic that the neighboring country should evolve in order to reach an "acceptable social standard" that would bring about the emergence of a new form of social cohesion with Christian roots:

When the majority of the Haitian people will achieve this point in its evolution, the number of families of the Christian type in its bosom will expand and the barbaric habits that enable sexual promiscuity and incestuous unions will disappear. The requirements of its new standard of life will create an obstacle that will prevent the population from growing at an alarming speed. (40)

Catholicism is seen as the guarantor of "morality" (defined in opposition to Haitian "barbarism") and intimately linked to progress. Yet, according to Balaguer, the cultural, religious, moral and racial basis is under threat:

Santo Domingo's de-nationalization – which has been carried out persistently for over a century through trade with the worst sector of the Haitian population – has made worrisome progress. Our racial origin and our tradition as a Hispanic people should not prevent us from recognizing that national identity finds itself in danger of disintegrating if we do not employ drastic remedies against the threat that comes from the neighboring Haiti. (46)

Like Peña Batlle's political speeches on Trujillo, this excerpt serves as a retrospective justification for the slaughter of Haitians and Dominican-Haitians in 1937, which was the starting point for the so-called "dominicanización of the border." In fact, Balaguer even puts Trujillo's policy of recuperating the border on the same level as the centralizing agenda of Spain's Catholic Kings in the fifteenth century:

This work is equivalent, then, to forming once and for all the nature of the Republic and, despite all the differences, can be compared to that realized by Isabella I in her effort to extirpate the Moorish element from Spain and to cleanse the race with the help of the Holy Office and the memorable edict of 1492. (78)

The necessary and inevitable task to introduce these "drastic cures" in the name of the "Dominican race," then, falls to Trujillo, who is presented as the only worthy successor to the Catholic Kings of Spain:

All the Dominican statesmen that occupied the presidential throne between 1844 and 1930 were without a doubt conscious of the gravity of the problem. All recognized that the influence of Haiti would result in the loss of national character and the progressive adulteration of the race. But there was not a single one of these governors who would have thought of resolving the problem with successful measures. (94)

The fact that *La isla al revés* was reedited 36 years after its original publication means that there is a shift in the horizon of expectations. The most obvious effect is the transfer of the epistemic power formerly held by Trujillo to the person of Balaguer. This becomes obvious in the final paragraphs of the text, which are new. Balaguer offers a series

of regulations oriented towards a political solution to the Haitian problem. Amongst other measures, he suggests that a parallel constitution for both countries should be conceived:

I do not believe that Haiti, given its furious love of self-determination, would accept any kind of intervention of international character in its internal affairs. But it would be the establishment of a parallel constitution for Haiti and Santo Domingo that would guarantee the existence of a democratic regime fundamentally identical in both countries. Under a constitution authorized by the two peoples and similar for both countries in its essential outline, Haiti and Santo Domingo would be able to help one another. The international political status, which they would accept of their own will, would prevent excesses in the governors' authority as well as abuses of power and individual tyrannies. (220)

According to Balaguer, such a constitution, in conjunction with the recognition of "dual citizenship" and the "express prohibition of reelection" of leaders would set "an example of political maturity and of institutional reorganization that has not been achieved under any of the political systems of our time" (220). ¹⁶ As contradictory as these "solutions" might

traditional hatred. The work that would be worthiest of applause -

¹⁶ By proposing a political confederation between the two peoples of the island, Balaguer adopts an approach that had been articulated decades before, first by Pedro Francisco Bonó, and then by Américo Lugo. Bonó thought that the Haitian president Boyer, under whose term of office the island remained unified from 1822 to 1844, had not known how to use the opportunity to "have founded the unity of the two peoples on a fair and profitable base, [...] the confederation" (quoted by San Miguel 77). Lugo, in turn, declared that "Haiti is for us something more than a people that is our friend. It has been and will always be the guarantee of our independence, especially when we place the love we owe it above our

seem after the harsh representation of the "Haitian problem," they are designed to make Balaguer appear to be the most capable person for sorting out this island that is "upside down." This rhetorical maneuver links him closely to Sarmiento. I am referring here to the clear underlying political motivations of Sarmiento's Facundo, which are only revealed in the last part of the text where the author declares his competence as potential future statesman. Balaguer employs an analogous strategy when he tackles the subject of Haiti from a historicist and teleological perspective. After his interpretation of the long chain of turbulent events that have shaped the Dominican Republic, Balaguer proceeds to autolegitimate himself as the only person capable of revealing the necessity to face this "problem" and as the expert on the issue of how to carry out this urgent patriotic work.

In this context, it is informative to examine the reception of *La isla al revés* in the Dominican press. Most commonly, the work was viewed as political propaganda against the presidential candidate of the pro-government party, José F. Peña Gómez. In this interpretation, the fact that *La isla al revés* fed anti-Haitian prejudices and the myth of Haiti's insistence on the island's indivisibility was read as an attempt to counteract the popularity of the candidacy of Peña

whether by the government, society or private individuals – will be that which promotes love between both nations. The day that one great statesman will emerge in either of the two Republics, the confederation of the two countries will become a political objective of utmost significance" (203). It is evident that Bonó's and Lugo's ideas point towards the existence of a perspective that differs from that proposed by the *Trujillista* city. Nevertheless, this counterdiscourse that existed on the ideological horizon of the first half of the twentieth century did not pose a serious threat to the institutional status of the dominant knowledge system, which would not begin to show clear signs of fragility until the beginning of the eighties.

¹⁷ Carlos J. Alonso. "Civilización y barbarie." Hispania. 72.2 (1989): 256-263.

Gómez (who was Black) amongst voters (García 34; Cepeda 9). 18

In other words, despite Balaguer's efforts to legitimate himself by gesturing towards a peaceful co-existence with Haiti, this maneuver is not able to erase the overall effect of the work, in which the specter of Haiti is evoked as an element that de-stabilizes the body of the Dominican nation. It thus contributes to the reaffirmation of one of the fundamental tropes of the *Trujillista* city, namely the perception of Santo Domingo as "the most Spanish and most traditionalist people of America" (*La isla al revés* 63).

Most recently, Manuel Núñez has defended this idea on national culture and history in a problematic essay entitled El ocaso de la nación dominicana (1990, 2001). Núñez forms part of a political minority group of the extreme right, the Unión Nacionalista (the Nationalist Union), which is accorded a lot of visibility in the Dominican media. This organization rose to the public scene in 1994, a short time after some contested elections that secured Balaguer's presidency for the seventh time. Point by point, Núñez's essay reinforces the ideology of the Trujillista city. With the goal to reinvigorate the archive, Núñez refines its basic narrative in order to adapt it more successfully to the present. In other words, to guarantee the continuity of the archive, one needs to reinvent its fundamental message. Slajov Zizek has described this way of ideological perpetuation in the following way:

nationalist discourse was successful in the elections of 1986 and 1990.

¹⁸ The *Partido Reformista Social Cristiano*, led by Balaguer, linked Peña Gómez with Haiti as part of its campaign strategy, thus presenting Balaguer as the only valid option for defending the Hispanic nature of national being and the geopolitical integrity of the Dominican State. This

¹⁹ The second edition of *El ocaso de la nación dominicana*, an edition that is "corrected and expanded," is 350 pages longer than the original publication of 1990.

[...] in order for an ideological edifice to occupy the hegemonic place and legitimize the existing power relations, it HAS to compromise its founding radical message —and the ultimate "heretics" are simply those who reject this compromise, sticking to the original message. (On Belief 8)

Núñez's strategy consists of slightly modifying the "founding radical message" of the Dominican nation's archive, adding some new elements to the framework that sustains its supremacy. Apparently conscious of the gradual weakening of its hegemonic status, Núñez adds new variables whilst simultaneously re-invigorating already existent ones. The question of how to preserve "the nation-state founded in 1844" is the pivotal axis of his essay (109). In Núñez's reasoning, the integrity of the Dominican Republic finds itself under threat from the "settlement" of illegal Haitians in its territory (137) as well as from the migratory flow of Dominicans leaving the island. Both groups are demonized as pathogenic agents, whose ways of thinking deform the body of the nation:

Everything points towards the decline of the Nation as we knew it. Emigration, culture, language, values, that which yesterday was the spiritual border [...] has been affected by changes in the national being that transform our rural culture and the spiritual countenance of our cities. As we distance ourselves more and more from what we have been, another nation is being born on the ruins of what we were, another nation whose relationship to the *haitianidad* of the countryside and the *americanidad* of the cities (both constituted by historic forces whose effects

are de-nationalizing) will forge new ways of life, new forms of culture, a new history. (237)

Despite his references to historical changes, it is obvious that for Núñez the ideal of "Dominican culture" is a type of monument that has remained unchanged throughout time. Its permanence must be defended by all means so as not to betray the rules of the superior abstract order – the State founded in the war against Haiti – which confers an automatic identity to the community. This line of reasoning has the effect of justifying any type of aggression by appealing to the safekeeping of the *sentimiento de pueblo*, a gesture reminiscent of Peña Batlle. As Núñez declares: "the feeling of national unity does not manifest itself as an aggression, but as a desire to defend independence and cultural cohesion; as a desire to preserve the homogeneity of nation and state, of the population and the territory" (105).

According to Núñez, the post-*Trujillista* intelligentsia has distorted the history of the nation by not sufficiently acknowledging the magnitude of the nineteenth-century proindependence conflicts and what the latter entail as an affirmation of a solid *sentimiento de pueblo*, a feeling of national belonging:

The disappearance of this past, of its values, of a Dominican subjectivity (literature, beliefs, context) and of historical accounts, constitutes a sacrifice of the national ideal. One of the biggest betrayals [is committed by] Dominican historians, whose accounts show no mercy with the heritage of the nation instead of creating values that are the source of national continuity. It is not the objective of these historians to make us understand the events that enabled our independence from Haiti, but to omit military history; the objective is not to preserve

collective memory, respecting the monumental past, but to substitute it with economic and sociological vulgarities. (139)

This reference to the "monumental past," which in Núñez's opinion should be revered, is indicative of his compulsive anxiety to legitimate the origin of the nation-state. To highlight this foundation is the main objective of his argument, which revolves around the contemporary national "crisis." According to him, this crisis stems from "the incapacity to interpret the consequences of Haitian immigration" (129). Turning to the thought of Ernest Renan, Núñez reiterates the necessity to recover everyday "historical consciousness" as the only guarantee for the survival of Dominican culture in the present. In other words, the author believes that nationality needs to be reaffirmed internally by the individuals that perform it. Núñez elaborates on the idea of "national consciousness" in the following extract:

[...] this is a historical interpretation. Beliefs and values that must be transmitted from generation to generation. Communal coexistence. Struggle against all foreign interference. Collective projects, memory of a lived life, all this acts like a fence against the imposition of new values, but also as an incentive for creativity. (217)

The creative dimension that Núñez associates with this manifestation of "national consciousness" constitutes one of the pillars of nationalist thinking. Derrida has examined this principal aspect of nationalism. He starts from an analysis of Fichte's "Discourses to the German Nation" to describe the circularity characteristic of what he calls the "national principle" in philosophy. Derrida argues that all nationalism is "essentially and thoroughly philosophical, [that] it is a

philosopheme" (10); it falls to nationalist discourse "to bring to the clarity of the concept what was already there, as unconscious philosophy," that is to say, the *sentimiento de pueblo*. Of course, in order for this foundation to survive unchanged it needs to be adapted to the contingencies of the historical present. This means that the validity of this origin depends precisely on the capacity to be re-inscribed into everyday praxis as a novelty:

The figure of the circle imposes itself since the point for thematic philosophy is to return to an origin which, moreover, itself consists only in a principle of originality and creativity. Creativity is circular, the creation of the new [...] is only a recourse, a resource, a circular return to the source. ("Onto-Theology of National Humanism" 12)

In Núñez's argument, the independence of 1844 shaped the cohesive "source" to which one has to return in the pursuit of maintaining Dominican culture. Hence the author repeatedly refers to issues such as political sovereignty, the constitutional state founded on the rule of law, geography and the constitution in order to bring out the supposed precariousness of Dominican culture confronted with the "permanent colonization" (137) of the Haitians: "with the Haitians enters also their "cultural view of the world," their life styles, their work habits, their customs, their biological heredity, when they are integrated into the ethnic trunk of the Dominican Republic" (138).

²⁰ This obsession to identify in the independence movement the origins of national identity, that is to say, to envision the moment of independence as the degree zero to which one has to return with the task of constantly re-authorizing it, is a cliché prevalent in much Latin American writing, especially in the essay (Alonso, *The Burden of Modernity* 3-19).

Using the same rhetorical maneuver as La isla al revés, Núñez's thesis contrasts everything that is Haitian with all that is Dominican to formulate its vision of the nation. Ernesto Sagás therefore describes Núñez, along with Luis Julián Pérez (who is also member of the Unión Nacionalista and author of another contemporary manifestation of the Trujillista city, Santo Domingo frente al destino),²¹ as the "new ideologues of anti-haitianism": "the new anti-haitian ideologues present culture as homogeneous, static, and immutable. When they talk about "Dominican culture," they idealized Hispanic-based conception of to an Dominicanness that developed centuries ago and remains in place, except for the threat that it faces from Haiti" (73). Compared to his precursors' works, the particularity of Núñez's interpretation lies in the fact that he privileges variables of a cultural and legal nature rather than appealing to "race" to establish the distinction between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Indeed, in the model of national identity espoused by Núñez, race is described as an aspect that has been overcome in the discussion Dominicanness:

[...] Dominicanness brings together all races, and transcends them. Because it is the realization of a mentality and of a way of life forged over several centuries of coexistence of Blacks, Whites and *mulatos*. (22)

Later on in his essay, Núñez elaborates further on this by formulating a moral imperative that must be taken into account in the shaping of cultural identity:

²¹ Luis Julián Pérez. Santo Domingo frente al destino. Santo Domingo: Taller, 1990.

Race is not the foundation of Dominican identity. Our idea of the nation is not founded on any race. Nor, as is obvious, is it based on religious unity. The constitutional principle of our nation is based on the equality of all Dominicans, no matter their race, or religion or ideology. It is a moral principle formed by the collective belief that these sociological disparities do not necessarily constitute a threat to maintaining the unity of the nation. (61)

Núñez implies that Dominicans constitute a "cosmic race," a universal race of Latin roots, in which differences disappear, recalling José Vasconcelos's theorizations of the beginning of the twentieth century.

As the most recent prolongation of the theory of dominicanidad as articulated by Peña Batlle and Balaguer from the 1940s onwards, Nuñez's thinking relies on the commonplace of a national culture under siege by elements that are foreign to its nature. Of course, this rhetoric of disaster sees Haiti as the most harmful foreign agent:

The country has forgotten itself. It wanders erratically in a labyrinth without finding solutions because its understanding of its own history has been amputated. The starving hordes of the neighboring country are spread all over it. Our society finds itself in an entangled situation. A stormy minority is eroding our foundations; it is wiping out the prosperity we have laboriously carved out. (79)

Thus, while Balaguer denounces the Haitian "danger" by referring to the idea of "peaceful penetration" of the territory (*La isla al revés* 31), Núñez emphasizes the Haitian "will to get embroiled in our history, to embed themselves as a national

minority in our nation-state" (105). However, Haitians are not the only threat to the integrity of the nation. Núñez also attacks the institutions that denounce the situation of Haitians in Santo Domingo (amongst them are NGOs, international organizations, the Haitian diaspora and the island's Jesuit order), as well as the Dominican diaspora:

The fact that they undervalue themselves leads Dominicans to reproduce a feeling of incompetence that affects the belief in their own strength. A resigned impotence before the challenges caused by the decomposition that is generated by the introduction of a culture of emigration, of flight, of the idealization of life abroad into the interstices of Dominican society; by a process of colonization by Haitians with no identity papers, who are sponsored by conspiring forces that bluntly demand the dismemberment of the Dominican territory. (459)

In Núñez's writing, the ideology of the archive is camouflaged in issues relating to national sovereignty; in other words, his work continues the nationalist thinking of Peña Batlle and Balaguer. For all three authors, the trope of the border (of a geographical, cultural or "spiritual" nature) occupies a preeminent place in the formulation of the nation. The following excerpt by Núñez, for instance, could be inserted into any of the works of his predecessors without requiring any modification:

If the factors that are currently at work within the country, regarding this human colonization, maintain their imperturbable growth, if nothing detains what is now taking place without apparent obstacles, then we will soon reach a point of no

return. On this day the national border will have disappeared. (198)

These glaring examples of a rhetoric of disaster in El ocaso de la nación dominicana attest to the sense of unease that encroaches upon the archons of the Trujillista city, as they find themselves increasingly incapable of dominating the debate on Dominican cultural identity. It can be argued, then, that Núñez's anxiety may be read as reflective of the erosion of the monumental national identity developed within the boundaries of the Trujillista city. Its apologists begin to sense the immanent disappearance of this narrative of the nation. It is precisely the precarious status of the archive that produces this rebirth of nationalist opinions that seem to belong to previous periods of Dominican history. In other words, the space of the nation is less and less subject to the precepts that had conferred legitimacy upon the theory of a homogenous Dominicanness in the period of the dictatorship. Nowadays, nation becomes increasingly the the space of incomprehensible this type of rhetorico-political to technology. What before had guaranteed the nationalist intellectual's place of privilege in the social body - the codification of the city in accordance with irrefutable regulations - loses its validity faced with the quantity of dynamic and heterogeneous language games that are now competing for the socio-cultural space and the urban politician. As Michel de Certeau states in another context:

> The language of power is in itself "urbanizing," but the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power. The city becomes the dominant theme in political legends, but it is no longer a field of programmed and regulated operations. Beneath the discourses that ideologize

the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate; without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer. (95)

These rhizomatic discursive combinations start to redefine the way in which identity is explained in recent cultural history, thus bearing witness to a clear epistemological rupture with the theory of a stable national identity. This rupture is manifested in much of the island's literary production, as well as in the thinking and the literature of the diaspora. These texts integrate diversity into the discussion on Dominicanness, acknowledging thus an element of Dominican culture that must be included in any archeology of regional knowledge of the last forty years.

In the following chapters, I will examine the way in which this new model of interpreting national identity complicates the identitarian discourse endorsed by the archons of the *Trujillista* city. The latter reluctantly begin to notice how much terrain their normative sermon has lost in the social imaginary. Because of the immanence of the *Trujillista* city's collapse, we can hear its echoes resound in the works of Balaguer and Núñez, "the rumor being only the way," as Maurice Blanchot states, "in which the city lets it be known that it is deserted, always more deserted" (*The Step Not Beyond* 134).

Chapter 3 Writing Identity from the Margins of the *Trujillista* City

Many people have a tree growing in their heads [...]

A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze/Guattari²²

In the transitional period, the Dominican conception of identity was being remolded in certain marginal sectors of society. However, these changes did not affect the dominicanidad that continued to be propagated in official culture. In fact, the imagery associated with a unifying, "European" dominicanidad is still influential today (even though it is a little more moderate as a result of the critique it has been subjected to over the past four decades). In theoretical terms, the Dominican situation can best be described Derrida's ofemploying notion the "monolingualism of the other." Derrida writes that the character of culture is structurally "colonial":

First and foremost, the monolingualism of the other would be that sovereignty, that law originating from elsewhere, certainly, but also primarily the very language of the Law. And the Law as Language. Its experience would be ostensibly autonomous, because I have to speak this law and appropriate it in order to understand it as if I was giving it to myself, but it remains necessarily beteronomous, for such is, at bottom, the essence of any law. [...] The monolingualism imposed by the other operates by relying upon that foundation, here, through a sovereignty whose essence is always colonial, which tends, repressively and irrepressibly, to reduce

²² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: Continuum International, 2004. 17.

language to the One, that is, to the hegemony of the homogenous. This can be verified everywhere, everywhere this homo-hegemony remains at work in the culture, effacing the folds and flattening the text. (Monolingualism of the Other 39-40)

The "homo-hegemony" of the *Trujillista* model of cultural identity continues to prop up this dynamic of dependency or "symbolic conquest" (Derrida 1998: 39).

In La jaula de la melancolía, 23 Roger Bartra emphasizes the fact that the articulation of Mexican identity was closely linked to political power. However, he also shows how the mechanism that produces this entelechy in the case of Mexico is present in the history of the modern West in general, with France naturally as the paradigm. His analysis of postrevolutionary Mexico shows certain similarities with the case of the Dominican Republic on its way towards modernity. It is generally thought that the island's modernity begins with the historical situation created by the first US invasion. Already before the invasion (in fact, since 1905), the US Department of the Treasury had been in control of the country's finances to an extent established by the Monroe Doctrine. Later on, in April 1916, the US marines disembarked on the shores of the Dominican capital under the usual pretext of "protect[ing] the life and interests of the foreigners living in the city" (Moya Pons, Manual 469), at a time when a coup d'état against president Juan Isidro Jimenes was imminent. The occupation lasted until 1924 and resulted in the "re-organization" of the country's economy, the disarmament of the population, the "pacification" of the regional rebel caudillos, the organization of a National Guard trained by the US military, and the development of a vast

²³ Roger Bartra. *La jaula de la melancolía: identidad y metamorfosis del mexicano*. México, DF [Mexico City]: Grijalbo, 1987.

program of reforms in public administration, education, trade, and communications. Initially, the changes brought about by the presence of the US military body on the island were met with limited resistance from civil society;²⁴ but when the military governors became increasingly repressive, the lettered class overcame their inertia and began to denunciate the ruling system, both on the national as well as on the diplomatic and international plane. Amongst these nonconformist intellectuals who resisted occupation were Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal, Américo Lugo, Emiliano Tejera, Enrique Henríquez and the modernist poet Fabio Fiallo.

The socio-political re-organization carried out by the US military government served as a base for the national agenda drawn up by the technocracy of the dictatorship from the thirties onwards. Trujillo, who was trained in the select National Guard (created by the marines), would continue the process of accelerated modernization begun during the time of the US intervention. In the previous chapters, we have seen that the modernity that bore the stamp of *Trujillismo* resulted in the adaptation and reformulation of a specific discourse on identity. I have also highlighted how, during the period of Trujillo, this definition of the Dominican subject was institutionalized by the political elite with the help of the collaborationist *intelligentsia*. The end of the formal

²⁴ There were two notable exceptions to this, one of them a *caudillo* of the northern zone, Desiderio Arias. With impulsive forays only comparable to those of General Santa Anna in Mexico in the nineteenth century, Arias had been, since the beginning of the twentieth century, involved in numerous skirmishes with serious political consequences, deciding the fate of presidents and other high-ranking politicians in the Dominican Republic. He was shot by the *Trujillista* army in 1934. The other important site of resistance was in the Eastern provinces. It was headed by a group of workers from the sugar industry widely known as the "gavilleros." Entrenched in the *Cordillera Oriental*, this insurgent group fought a prolonged guerrilla war until its defeat by the marines in 1921.

dictatorship with the assassination of Trujillo in 1961 did not bring about a drastic change in the way national culture was theorized in contrast to what one might have hoped for, given that this historical moment seemed to promise a transition towards democracy. While the new order of things opened the door a crack to revisionary efforts in the identitarian debate, the scholars who belonged to the vanguard and who inherited the intellectual space of the Trujillista school of thought continued to theorize Dominicanness from a monolithic perspective. In other words, by avoiding the discourse of diversity in the debate on cultural identity, the intellectuals of the transitional period offered a damaging and influential version of identity that has led even "progressive" thinkers to discuss the issue of dominicanidad from the perspective of the monolithic knowledge system of the Trujillista city. It is a fact that even those post-Trujillista intellectuals who attempted to problematize the unifying discourse that had preceded them continued to affirm its validity and thus prolonged its institutional principles. Critical discourse in the postdictatorship period was thus limited and did little to change the already existing political culture, which - since it did not receive pressure from the different discursive regimes continued to dominate the social imaginary during the subsequent decades, especially when it came to defining the national subject.

It is worth illustrating how those critical voices paradoxically reinforced the fundamental aspects of the discourse on Dominican national identity. As an example of a revisionist intellectual falling prey to his own rhetoric, one might refer to the recognized historian Frank Moya Pons. In a talk given in 1980 under the title "Modernization and Changes in the Dominican Republic," Moya Pons performs a diachronic stroll across one hundred years of Dominican history. Arriving at the period of the dictatorship, he

denounces the way in which *Trujillista* ideology "confused Dominicans" (245) with regard to their racial and cultural reality. However, he brings his talk to a close with the following assertion:

Trujillismo was an optimism that prompted the rebirth of the confidence of Dominicans in their own ability to advance by themselves. With its unrestrained propaganda of the excellence of all that is Dominican (as long as one identified with Trujillo and was opposed to all that is Haitian), Trujillismo managed to unleash latent energies in Dominican society and to implement new efforts to produce wealth that would later serve as the base for the current economic development in the Dominican Republic. (245)

This declaration that there are latent "energies" in Dominican society, which were revived by the machinery of the Trujillista ideology and which continue to have an effect upon the present, reveals the inherent contradictions of intellectual work during the transitional period. Here, one of today's most renowned Dominican historians puts forward the hypothesis that Trujillismo acted as a catalyst that helped to awaken the hardworking spirit of the Dominican people from its dormant state, liberating their "latent energies" and directing them along the path of material progress. Moya Pons's ambivalent rhetoric has the effect of reviving the notion of Trujillo's providential destiny in Dominican history, replicating its previous elaboration by the regime's intellectuals, including Peña Batlle, Balaguer, Pedro Contín Aybar, Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, Héctor Incháustegui Cabral and Max Henríquez Ureña among others.

Another event even closer to the present will allow us to continue this examination of the contradictions that

intellectual discourse of the post-dictatorship era faces. I am referring to an event that might appear irrelevant, but that has far-reaching symbolic resonances. In 2002, the Premio Nacional Feria del Libro E. León Jimenes – one of the most prestigious and also one of the most profitable awards in the country was awarded to Manuel Núñez for the re-edition of his essay El ocaso de la nación dominicana. In the previous chapter, I showed how this text rehabilitates every one of the axioms of nationalist thinking exhibited by the Trujillista intelligentsia, most noticeably perhaps through its postulation of an immutable cultural identity that draws on its Hispanic roots and that needs to be protected from the foreign "denationalizing" elements that threaten its purity. The fact that this recognition was awarded by the Secretary of Culture during the Feria Internacional del Libro of Santo Domingo with the monetary support of the tobacco company E. León Jimenes illustrates the persistent link between political and economic power and official culture. However, it is even more significant for the purposes of this analysis to point out that among the judges responsible for the decision are three of the most notorious critical voices of the post-dictatorship era, namely Andrés L. Mateo, Carlos Esteban Deive and Marcio Veloz Maggiolo. By awarding the prize to El ocaso de la nación dominicana, these intellectuals bestowed recognition upon a work that repeats the same ideas about Dominican cultural identity that they had proposed to dismantle years before. This becomes clear when we compare the premises of the award-winning work to those of the jurors. For instance, in Mito e historia en la era de Trujillo (1993), Andrés L. Mateo enumerates the fundamental features of the ideological apparatus of Trujillismo and emphasizes the way in which it affects Dominican reality:

The classic themes of what is considered the "ideology of *Trujillismo*" can be summed up in the

following recurrent characteristics: messianism, Hispanism, Catholicism, anti-communism, anti-haitianism. All of these have an instrumental – and far too close – relation to politics, and are marked by a resounding simplicity in their falsification of history and reality. They are closely related to propaganda, and not to ideological rationalization [...] through their references, they were baptized in the mythic dimension that with inalterable splendor emanates from the "Era" and spreads out in history. (136)

As I have shown in the second chapter, each of the five "recurrent characteristics" of the ideology of *Trujillismo* is present in *El ocaso de la nación dominicana* to an extent that is frightening.

The case of Carlos Esteban Deive is even more dramatic, given that his work touches on one of the central aspects of *Trujillista* theory on cultural identity. In *Vodú y magia en Santo Domingo* (1975), Deive used a structuralist ethnographic approach to demonstrate that animist rites, which are mainly associated with Haitian vodou but are in fact performed also throughout the Dominican Republic, do not have their roots exclusively in the customs of the neighboring country – as the proponents of a *Trujillista dominicanidad* would have it – but have formed part of insular culture since colonial times when the first contingents of enslaved Africans arrived. Focusing on the various popular religions as contributors to national culture allows Deive to denounce the bias of nationalist discourse:

[...] this country is heir to a Hispanic culture and to another one – or even several other ones – that came from Black Africa. Santo Domingo belongs, in fact, to the African nations, a reality that the traditional *criollo* historiography has kept secret, in a skillful instance of a sleight of hand and in the name of a fanatical Hispanism. (15)

Nationalist Hispanophile discourse, in other words, is completely removed from historical reality.

Yet despite these inconsistencies found in divergent intellectual discourse even after the end of the *Trujillato*, there are voices that emerged from the field of literature that contested and criticized the national identity of the *Trujillista* city from early on. I am here referring to texts that reveal an uncomfortable relation to cultural doxa. They establish themselves – sometimes in an oblique manner – as solid "counter-narratives" of the nation, as ways of thinking about culture that are critical of the monumentalist account of the history of the fatherland and its positing of a culturally uniform identity.

In the present chapter, I analyze the poetry of three authors who were active during the time of the dictatorship: Manuel del Cabral, Tomás Hernández Franco and Aída Cartagena Portalatín. Each of them produced a poetic corpus that contradicts the theoretical assumptions about culture and identity associated with the lettered imagination of *Trujillismo*, thus putting forward an aesthetic of resistance.

It was during the forties that the political and symbolic authority of *Trujillismo* was consolidated. Despite the rampant repression under these circumstances, there emerged voices from the realm of literature that strove to distance themselves from the writerly protocols affiliated with the ideology of political culture. Manuel del Cabral, Tomás Hernández Franco and Aída Cartagena Portalatín were part of this group of authors interested in producing, as Franklin Gutiérrez writes, "a poetry that champions a new interpretation of the political, social and historical reality of the Dominican people" (41). Not surprisingly, they faced

many personal difficulties in a state that intervened in all imaginable ambits. The writers battled in different ways against this situation. Some opted for exile rather than to compromise their artistic activity; the poet Pedro Mir (1913-2000), Juan Bosch (1909-2001) and Juan Isidro Jimenes Grullón (1903-1983) all settled in Cuba. 25 Other important writers, including Héctor Incháustegui Cabral, Manuel del Cabral and even Tomás Hernández Franco, developed heterodox aesthetics while adhering unconditionally to the regime, serving as ambassadors, consuls and ministers in various countries of America and Europe. Two of these poetcivil servants, del Cabral and Hernández Franco, stand out for their poetic treatment of the theme of blackness, a subject that, as we have seen before, did not sit easily with the progovernment conception of national culture. In this sense, the poetry of del Cabral and Hernández Franco destabilizes the cultural model of the national Dominican subject promoted through the spokespeople of the Trujillista city.

Manuel del Cabral and Tomás Hernández Franco were not the first Dominican writers to assert that the black component of society forms an integral part of national identity. They followed in the footsteps of writers like Francisco Muñoz del Monte (1800-1868), Juan Antonio Alix (1833-1918) and Rubén Suro (1916). However, it is Manuel del Cabral's work that is usually highlighted in Dominican literary history due to the success of *Trópico negro* (1942).

The texts of *Trópico negro* form part of the literary tradition initiated in the Hispanic Caribbean in the thirties with the poetry of the Puerto Rican writer Luis Palés Matos and two Cuban writers, Nicolás Guillén and Emilio Ballagas.

²⁵ The life in exile allowed these authors to be more explicitly political than other writers of the *Trujillista* period. In fact, in 1939, Bosch and Jimenes Grullón founded the *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano*, the political organization that, in Havana, united the opposition to the regime of Trujillo.

Like his Caribbean fellow writers, del Cabral evokes all the elements that are identified with the African heritage (especially music) to celebrate blackness as a fundamental substratum not only of Dominican but, more generally, Caribbean identity. One of the maneuvers that del Cabral employs is the use of every-day vocabulary with pejorative connotations employed to interpellate the black subject. This provocative gesture is directed at a society that is obsessed with the illusion of its own whiteness. However, Dominican literary critics have not recognized this, as the following comment by Franklin Gutiérrez will show:

[...] for Manuel del Cabral and the rest of his group the black person is not capable of overcoming his tribal nature nor the rhythm of the drum, and his physical qualities are exposed in degrading language. The lips, for instance, are "bembas" [thick lips], the curly hair, "pasa" [literally "raisin," a term used to refer to a black person's hair], and the stomach, "panza" [paunch]. In other words, [for him] the black person is not a human being like everyone else, but a sort of object of ridicule that serves to entertain the society that rejects him. (45)

However, I argue that representing the black subject at a time when pro-government culture promoted his/her erasure from the identitarian model of the nation, del Cabral's poetry acquires nuances of defiance and rebelliousness. This can be seen clearly in poems like "Trópico picapedrero" [The quarry worker's Tropic], a poem that is particularly subversive of the cultural politics furthered by *Trujillismo*. On the one hand, it challenges the supposedly "scientific" nature of the discourse of intellectuals like Peña Batlle and Balaguer when it shows racial difference to be an arbitrary designation: "Hombres de voz blanca, su piel negra lavan" [Men of a white voice/wash

their black skin] (75). The other important oppositional feature emerges when the poetic voice identifies those Blacks "of white voice" working in the quarry as Haitians:

Contra la inocencia de las piedras blancas los haitianos pican, bajo un sol de ron. Los negros que erizan de chispas las piedras son noches que rompen pedazos de sol. (76)

[Against the innocence of the white stones the Haitians work, under a sun of rum. The Blacks who make stones throw sparks are like the night that breaks bits of sun.]

One must note that *Trópico negro* was published in Buenos Aires when the author was living in the Argentine capital as the head of the Dominican legation. This important diplomatic post was given to him as a direct result of the influential position of his father, Mario Fermín del Cabral, in the edifice of political power. This ambivalent position of working simultaneously as artist and government official seems to have created some difficulties for him after the publication of *Trópico negro*. My suspicion is based on an examination of his subsequent work, *Compadre Mon* (1943), in which blackness ends up being displaced from the geocultural space of the Dominican Republic and is shown to be rooted exclusively in Haiti.

In Compadre Mon, del Cabral incorporates numerous motifs of the tradition of gaucho poetry, which was inaugurated with Martín Fierro (1872) by José Hernández. In particular, he uses the tropes of the border and of the exaltation of the landscape, both of which are epitomized in the protagonist, Compadre Mon. The poem is set during the politically turbulent years of the beginning of the twentieth century, the period of the first US military occupation. The

greed of the foreign governors results in the loss of land: "Mas hoy, Compadre Mon, también se va tu llano, /míralo en el bolsillo del norteamericano" [But today, Compadre Mon, your plain is also taken away/ you can see it in the pocket of the North American] (49). This loss of land has implications on the level of identity. Indeed, in the elegiac first part of the text, Daisy Cocco de Filippis sees the manifestation of a "paradigm of dominicanidad that is about to disappear and that is personified in the old Mon" (75). Early on in the poem, the body of Compadre Mon is presented as a synecdoche for the Dominican territory: "yo me puse a leer tus cicatrices [...]/ porque tu cuerpo es una geografía" [I started to read your scars [...]/ because your body is geography] (22). In the introductory note, del Cabral invokes Compadre Mon in the following manner: "Pero Compadre Mon, tú talvez no presentiste que yo picaría sobre tu sepulcro. Mi oficio ha sido ése: desenterrar un poco de la patria" (11). [But Compadre Mon, maybe you did not foresee that I would dig into your sepulcher. My trade has been to dig up a part of the fatherland]. The moment of crisis thus provokes a search for identity. What kind of a fatherland is disinterred in this poem, we may ask?

Del Cabral equips Compadre Mon with attributes that do not sit well with the dominant identitarian model. In the poem, the character that fits into the latter is identified as "criollo" by Compadre Mon and belongs to the land-owning oligarchy, a class that was allied to the economic interests of the United States: "Como es poco lo que callo, al criollo y al gringo voy/ a decirles lo que soy montado ya en mi caballo" (137) [Since what I hide is little, I will go to the criollo and to the gringo/ to tell them what I am, [I am] sitting on my horse already]. Compadre Mon, on the other hand, represents the masses and is identified with the *mulatez* of its constituents: "Hoy está el pueblo en mi cuerpo" [Today the people inhabits my body] (67).

The representation of Compadre Mon as a *mulato* hero is reminiscent of important figures of Dominican history, such as Francisco del Rosario Sánchez,²⁶ Gregorio Luperón²⁷ and Ulises Heureaux,²⁸ amongst others. Overall, however, the poem sabotages its own ideological making when it displaces the black element to the geo-cultural space of Haiti. This becomes obvious in the section that is entitled "Compadre Mon en Haití." In the latter, del Cabral makes Compadre Mon voice all the stereotypes associated with anti-Haitian rhetoric. For instance, one of the characters that Compadre Mon comes across in his life as fugitive "más allá de la frontera" [on the other side of the border] (137) turns out to be a "brujo" [sorcerer] who offers him a protective talisman. Compadre Mon interprets this gesture not as an act

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²⁶ Alongside Ramón Matías Mella and Juan Pablo Duarte, Francisco del Rosario Sánchez is considered to be one of the "Padres de la Patria" [Fathers of the Homeland]. From 1843 onwards, Sánchez gained notoriety as the principal leader of the secret society "La Trinitaria." This society was founded in 1838 by Duarte and other young people of the privileged elite. They were brought together by the idea of bringing about the separation from Haiti, a plan that had been around since 1822. Duarte went to Venezuela into exile and it was up to Sánchez to unite the separatist forces that achieved their task in February 1844.

²⁷ Gregorio Luperón is one of the key figures of the last decades of the nineteenth century. Among those responsible for recuperating national sovereignty lost in 1861 to Spain through a treaty of annexation, Luperón is the most famous. Once national independence was recuperated in 1865 after what Dominican history labels the 'War of Restoration,' Luperón continued to play a prominent role on the political and military scene until his death in 1897.

²⁸ From 1887 until 1899, the authoritarian Ulises Heureaux ("Lilís") was the president of the Dominican State. Helped by Luperón, he had climbed to political power (but he later turned his back on him after he had become the dictator of the Republic). His time as head of state was marked by a profound economic crisis that he tried to alleviate by looking for US support and protection. At the beginning of the 1890s he almost managed to lease to the foreign power the strategic island of Samaná in the North-East of the island.

of good will, but as a trick by someone who is only interested in money:

Aquel haitiano me dio un amuleto – un huesito –, y me dijo: "este poquito de animal te lo doy yo para que durmiendo o no, te defiendas de la gente pero ten presente que en este hueso estoy yo." Quiso decirme el maldito: que si el mundo bien me trata le mandara siempre plata mientras llevara el huesito. (141)

[This Haitian gave me an amulet –a little bone– and told me: I give you this little piece of animal so that sleeping or not you can defend yourself against people but keep in mind that I am in this bone. What the wretched person wanted to tell me is that if the world treats me well I should send him money while I continued to wear the bone.]

The unfortunate encounter with the "brujo" culminates in Compadre Mon's threat that people of his "type" are persecuted in the Dominican territory:

Pero al brujo conocí como el olfato al menú, y le dije: como tú, hay muchos presos allí... Si tú cruzas la frontera verás que tenemos fieras que adivinan hasta el mal del que va a morir tu nieto. (141)

[But I knew the sorcerer like the nose knows the menu and I told him: there are many criminals like you around.... If you cross the border you will see that we have wild animals that can even foretell the evil from which your grandson will die.]

Further on in the text, Compadre Mon rejects the help offered by another Haitian to dethrone the *caudillo* who is persecuting him in the Dominican territory. The reasons for his hostility towards Haitians become very clear at this moment:

Casi diciéndome el mota con su marrulla de insano: que con arma y con haitianos tumbaba a mi compatriota.

Y yo le grité: mañé, te equivocaste de punto, porque hemos nacido juntos en esta isla, lo sé pero no traiciono, no, la parte que me tocó si en ella no tengo el pie. (143)

[The black man tells me in his insane murmur that with weapons and with the help of Haitians I could knock down my compatriot. And I shouted at him: mañé [offensive term for "Haitian"], you go too far, because we were born together on this island, I know, but I do not betray the part of the island that I was born on, even if my foot doesn't touch its ground.]

The subtext of this exchange evokes the hackneyed thesis that Haitians insist on the indivisibility of the island and thus pose a threat. Compadre Mon, of course, insists on difference and on his patriotic loyalty that exceeds personal feuds with his countrymen. After another collision with the Haitian "brujo" (who urges him to make a pact with the devil), Compadre Mon chooses to face the danger that awaits him in the Dominican part of the island rather than staying in Haiti any longer: "Mas ya para mí no había remedio en la brujería./Perseguido aquí en mi tierra, y allá también perseguido/ preferí, donde he nacido, ser la paz o ser la guerra"[But for me there was no more cure in witchcraft.

Persecuted here on my land, and also there persecuted, I preferred to be at peace or at war in the place where I was born] (150). By demonizing everything that is Haitian and/or relates to African cultures, the section "Compadre Mon in Haiti" has the effect of reaffirming the principal characteristics of an Indianist, Hispanophile discourse on Dominican cultural identity. Within the space of the text, the historical crisis occasioned by the US invasion here results in the "hardening" of nationalist ideology.

Like Manuel del Cabral, Hernández Franco stumbled over the ideological platform of *Trujillismo* in the cultural realm. With respect to the question of identity, this led him to withdraw from iconoclastic stances in favor of positions that coincided with the political culture of the totalitarian regime. Yet, his poem *Yelidá* (1942) forcefully subverts the hegemonic interpretation of Dominican cultural identity.

Since the thirties, Hernández Franco's works had displayed a *dominicanidad "mulata,"* in which the African legacy occupied a place equivalent to that accorded to the Hispanic element. When he introduced the Cuban *declamadora* Eusebia Cosme during his visit to Santo Domingo in 1936, he phrased this as follows:

What Eusebia Cosme performs is the new sentiment that is set free, made word, finally liberated from the shackles of false prejudices, the sentiment of our true ethnicity that is the result of a chaotic mixing of races and souls and that has forever marked America with the unmistakable stamp of our "mulato" reality. (510)

Of course, for Hernández Franco, this "*mulato* reality" should generate the will to write a poetry that would similarly be marked by the stamp of *mulatez*, something that according to him had not happened in the Dominican context:

That our poets have not seen or have not wished to see the reality that forces itself upon them from all directions is an issue that must be resolved by them. Recent essays have shown the Dominican potential in this area. A potential that becomes a necessity if we really want to reconcile us to ourselves. (514)

When he was consul in El Salvador, Hernández Franco would put his vision of the "mulatez" of Dominican and, more generally, Latin American culture into practice with the publication of his most famous work, Yelidá. What is strange is that shortly after the publication of this text that celebrated mestizaje, his essay "Síntesis, magnitud y solución de un problema" (1943) was published in Cuadernos Dominicanos de Cultura. This magazine served to propagate Trujillista culture and, in the forties, was directed by Héctor Incháustegui Cabral and Max Henríquez Ureña. In the essay, Hernández Franco appears to disown the aesthetic project of Yelidá, as he takes on a task begun by Peña Batlle, namely to justify the measures employed to exterminate the Haitian population living in the Dominican Republic and ordered by Trujillo from 1937 onwards:

Those who would deny our sacred right to defend ourselves, faced with the terrifying problem that creates this situation, deny our most elemental right to live, deny the most rudimentary manifestations of the survival instinct. In the end, if we had not acted against the growing menace that threatens to submerge us, we Dominicans would have become traitors of our history, traitors of our Spanish legacy, traitors of America and of humanity. (547)

In order to bring out the extent of his change of direction, we must here turn to *Yelidá*, an extensive narrative poem (211 verses), in which the story of the protagonist of the same name is told in an epic style. The text is divided into six sections, narrating the story of Yelidá's parents, her birth and finally her arrival into adulthood, which in the text is marked by her first sexual experience.

The first section of the poem, entitled "Un antes" [A Before], narrates the story of Yelidá's father, a young Norwegian seaman called Erick:

Erick el muchacho noruego que tenía alma de fiord y corazón de niebla apenas sospechaba en su larga vagancia de horizontes la boreal estirpe de la sangre que le cantaba caminos en las sienes. (213)

[Erick, the young Norwegian who had the soul of a fjord and the heart of fog, hardly intuited that during his long vagrancy his northern blood in his temples was singing to him about his future paths.]

The use of Scandinavian references is meant to evoke an archetype of occidental culture. It is this archetype that is contrasted later on in the text with Afro-Caribbean culture represented by the Haitian mother of Yelidá. Early on, the poem seeks to establish a tension between the West (represented by signifiers that relate to technology and rationality) and the arcadian space of the Caribbean:

A los veintidos años Erick tenía la mirada gris azul densa de su alma puesta en dique y una voluntad de timón y quilla por llegar a las islas de las montañas de azúcar donde – decía el tío – las noches olían a cedro como las barricas de ron. (214)

[At twenty-two years of age Erick's gray-blue eyes were filled with his soul that was dammed in. He had a will of rudder and keel to get to the islands of the sugar mountains, where – said the uncle – the nights smelled of cedar like barrels of rum.]

The Scandinavian seaman is attracted to the ancient space that is crystallized in the Haitian coastal town of Fort Liberté, where Yelidá's mother lives:

Esta no es la historia de Erick al fin y al cabo que a los treinta años no era marinero y vendía arenques noruegos en su tienda de Fort Liberté mientras la esposa de Erick, madam Suquí [sic] rezaba a Legbá y a Ogún por su hombre blanco rezaba en la catedral por su hombre rubio. (215)

[After all, this is not the story of Erick who at thirty years was not a seaman anymore but sold Norwegian herrings in his shop in Fort Liberté while Erick's wife, madam Suquí prayed to Legbá and to Ogún for her white man, prayed in the Cathedral for her blond husband.]

The choice of Fort Liberté as the stage for the contact between Erick and madam Suquí is significant. This town in the North-East of Haiti is named after Toussaint L'Ouverture, who conquered it from the French in 1796. Most importantly, Fort Liberté is where Haitian independence was proclaimed in 1803. It is located only a few

miles from the border with the Dominican Republic. In fact, only about ten miles separate it by road from Dajabón, a border enclave of great historical importance for Dominicans, because of the numerous battles that were fought there against the Haitian army during the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the 1940s, when *Yelidá* was published, the mention of Dajabón would have activated the memory of an event that was still fresh in the collective memory: the slaughter of Haitians and Dominican-Haitians in 1937, begun in the area surrounding the Masacre river that crosses this town –a tragic irony of history.²⁹

In the poem, the relation between Erick and Madam Suquí is described through pathological metaphors. But this is not the poetic trope of the *amor hereos*, of love as a sickness, which stems from ancient Arabic poetry and the medieval lyric tradition. The sickness here refers to the corporal rather than the spiritual dimension. It manifests itself in the feverish and rickety body of Erick, who is suffering from malaria:

Erick amó a Suquiete entre accesos de fiebre escalofríos y palideces y tomaba quinina en grandes tragos de tafiá [sic] para sacarse de la carne a la muchacha negra para ahuyentarle de su cabeza rubia para que de los brazos se le fuera

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²⁹ Since the eighteenth century, the river Dajabón, better known as Masacre, marked the border between the Dominican Republic and the northern part of Haiti. The name Masacre comes from a violent skirmish between the French colonists and the *criollos* of the Spanish part of the island at the end of the seventeenth century. The slaughter ordered by Trujillo thus adds to the history of violence that has marked this river since colonial times. *El Masacre se pasa a pie* (1973), an autobiographical novel written by Freddy Prestol Castillo (an official of the dictatorship assigned to the village of Dajabón during the time of the slaughter) describes this infamous event in detail.

aquel pulido y agrio olor de bronce vivo y de jungla borracha. (215)

[Erick loved Suquiete between bouts of fever, shivers and pallor and he drank quinine with large gulps of tafia to rid his flesh of the black girl, to dispel her from his blond head, to expel the refined and sour smell of living bronze and drunken jungle from his arms.]

Contrary to José Alcántara Almánzar, who believes that in Yelidá Hernández Franco "contrasts the two races, placing the white race over the black one" (quoted by Gutiérrez 44), it seems to me that the sick body of the white man is swallowed up by the black woman eager to absorb the foreign element, which is fragile and helpless, in order to break it down into usable matter. Thus, Erick's weakened body (represented as parasitic in the text) comes to inseminate madam Suquí's body, which is linked to the power of the earth:

En la noche sudada de fiebres y marismas

Erick sin sueño marinero varado sobre la carne fría
y nocturna de Suquí
fue dejando su estirpe sucia de hematozoarios
y nostalgias
en el vientre de humus fértil de su esposa de tierra
y Erick murió un buen día entre Jesucristo
y Damballá-Queddó. 30 [...] (217)

[In the night, sweaty with fevers and marshes,

³⁰ This refers to Damballah-Ouedo, a god of Haitian and Dominican vodou. In the vodou of New Orleans his name is Li Grand Zombi. The cult of Damballah-Ouedo comes from the mythology of the region of Dahomey (now Benin); amongst other things, he is the guarantor of the cosmic order through his balancing of opposing forces (Métraux 332).

Erick, deprived of the sailor's dream that had run aground on the cold and nocturnal flesh of Suquí, sullied his lineage dirty with bloodsuckers and nostalgias in the stomach of fertile humus of his wife of earth

in the stomach of fertile humus of his wife of earth and Erick died one day between Jesus Christ and Damballá-Queddó.]

This scene is far removed from the nineteenth-century vision of national character that was still being endorsed by the political culture of the *Trujillista* city. In *Yelidá*, the European component disappears from the space to which it had been transplanted. Instead, "Western" culture is filtered through the African matrix that incorporates it. Nevertheless, the subalternity of the European element vis-à-vis the African one is balanced out in the end product of this racial and cultural symbiosis. Yelidá is presented as a hybrid being destined to make the notion of origin more complex:

Y así vino al mundo Yelidá en su vagido de gato
tierno
[]
con su torpeza jugosa de raíz y de sueño
pero empezó a crecer con lentitud de espiga
negra un día sí y un día no
blanca los otros
nombre vodú y apellidos de kaes
lengua de zetas
corazón de ice-berg [sic]
vientre de llama
hoja de alga flotando en el subsuelo de la noche
con fogatas y lejana llamada sorda para el rito. (217)
[And thus Yelidá was born with her cry of a tender c

at

with her awkwardness, made of root and dream, but she began to grow with the slowness of a spike black one day and one day not vodou name and last name of k's a tongue of z's heart of iceberg stomach of flame leaf of seaweed floating in the subsoil of the night with bonfires and distant memories deaf to rites.]

Yelidá constitutes an alien "sign" to her cultural setting. Customary auspices are of no use for interpreting this new agent whose nature is indecipherable: she is someone "para cuyo destino no tuvieron respuesta el gallo/ y la lechuza/ ni sabía nada el más sabio ni el más viejo" (217) [for whose destiny neither the cockerel nor the owl, neither the wisest nor the oldest man had an answer]. Yelidá is a fragile, multifaceted character, who does not adjust herself to any stable model of identity. Thus, any attempt to "map" this evasive subjectivity is headed for failure. At various points in the text the narrator declares his intent to represent her: "Y ésta quiere ser la historia de Yelidá al fin y al cabo" (217) [This is the story of Yelidá after all]. However, the text is patently unable to contain the story of a subject who resists being "fixed." Faced with this dilemma, the poetic narrator turns to description:

> Tacto de clave flanco sonoro al simple peso de la mirada paladar de fiera cuerpo de eterna juventud de serpiente nuevo para cada luna nueva completa para siempre como en el mito hermafrodita en el principio del mundo. (218)

[The touch of the cadence, her hip resounds at the simple weight of a glance a beast's palate her body has the serpent's eternal youth new for each new moon like in the hermaphrodite myth of the beginning of the world.]

This catalogue of features relates to foundations and the realm of myth. It has led critics to interpret the text as articulating the hatching of dominicanidad (Cocco de Filippis 1984, Incháustegui 1983, Alcántara 1979, Deive 1975). This reading is based on the androgynous character of Yelidá; her birth is compared to "[...] el mito hermafrodita/ en el principio del mundo" [the hermaphrodite myth/ of the beginning of the world]. Thus, Yelidá comes to embody the coincidentia oppositorum, resolving frictions between opposites.³¹ However, I think that the uniqueness of Yelidá as a subject consists not in the Scandinavian legacy of her father, nor in the Afro-Caribbean roots of her mother. As we are told. Yelidá is defined by the "enigma subterráneo de la resina y el ámbar" [subterranean enigma of resin and amber]. This "subterranean enigma" challenges the idea of a single and stable root, resembling instead the structure of anarchic development that is typical of the rhizome. As is well known, Deleuze and Guattari's critical perspective on Western thinking is based on the dichotomy between root and rhizome. In their opinion, rhizomatic systems differ from

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³¹One of the forms in which Damballah-Ouedo is represented in vodou iconography consists of two intertwined serpents in a palm tree; one corresponds to the god and the other to his divine partner, Ayida Ouedo. According to the myth, both gods merge into an androgynous being (Farris 177-179).

those of the root type because they do not seek to establish a permanent position from which they can become inalterable authorities; quite to the contrary, the rhizome is defined by a relational logic:³²

Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. The linguistic tree on the Chomsky model still begins at a point S and proceeds by dichotomy. On the contrary, not every trait in a rhizome is necessarily linked to a linguistic feature: semiotic chains of every nature are connected to very diverse modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc) that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of differing status. (7)

Rather than working on the basis of one single axis that structures meaning (like the root), the rhizome proceeds through the association of "semiotic links," which allow for

³² Putting forward a theory for the geo-cultural realm of the Caribbean as a space marked by the Poetics of Relation, the Martinican thinker Édouard Glissant expands on this potential for correlations inherent in the notion of the rhizome. His poetics of correspondences is perfectly suited to describe the historio-cultural reality of the Caribbean. His definition of Caribbeanness does not have recourse to the trope of an essence that could be traced from the past to the present, but refers to the "conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures" (144). Another one of Glissant's sources in his elaboration of the concept of Relation is Chaos Theory, and in particular the hypothesis that even the indefinite can constitute of form of knowledge. Antonio Benítez Rojo makes similar points in La isla que se repite, but his reading of Cubanness tends to privilege an identitarian homogeneity on the cultural level. Román de la Campa examines the similarities and differences between the theoretical propositions of Benítez Rojo and Glissant in "Mimicry and the Uncanny in Caribbean Discourse." Latin Americanism. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999. 85-120.

discursive multiplicity: "A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive" (8). These heterogeneous acts are defined later on as "lines of segmentarity," the raw material of the rhizome:

Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. (10)

It is the random nature of the growth of the rhizome that allows Deleuze and Guattari to describe it as "an antigenealogy" (12) and an "acentred" (23) multiplicity. The principal idea is that by avoiding privileging any constant that would structure meaning, but instead accepting the possible ramification of the ephemeral nucleus, any indication of origin or foundation disappears:

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and... and... This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be." Where are you going? Where are you coming from? These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation – all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a

conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic...). (27)

The representation of Yelidá may be read as following the fluctuations of the rhizome, as exhibiting this unpredictable logic. This quality intensifies and reaches its culminating point in the final verses: "Será difícil escribir la historia de Yelidá/ un día cualquiera" [It will always be hard to write the story of Yelidá](221). The poetic voice points to the failure of all attempts to represent Yelidá, acknowledging the difficulty involved in such an enterprise. Without a doubt, this difficulty is due to the fact that Yelidá does not fit into "arborescent" models that possess a fixed root (like the model of identity proposed by *Trujillista* ideology).

In his discussion of the work of Saint-John Perse, Maurice Blanchot explains how he would define the poetic condition: "The poet is in exile, is exiled from the city, exiled from regulated occupations and limiting obligations, from results, from tangible reality, from power" (L'espace littéraire 249). This utopian vision may offer some explanatory purchase for our reading of Yelidá. With its publication, Hernández Franco positioned himself at the margin of the cultural ethos of the Trujillista city and its all-embracing power, a fact that did not escape notice. Perhaps, it is no wonder then that a year later, he implicitly renounces his views and contributes to Cuadernos Dominicanos de Cultura. praising ideas on Dominican culture and history as set out by the top spokesman of the pro-government ideology in those days, Manuel Arturo Peña Batlle. The exile of the "poetic condition" is not always easily sustained.

The poetry of Manuel del Cabral and Tomás Hernández Franco shakes the foundations of the nation by problematizing the stability of the subject prescribed by its seemingly irrefutable norms. While del Cabral and Hernández Franco achieve this from a perspective that diverges on the issue of race, Aída Cartagena Portalatín does something similar from the perspective of gendered oppression. She foregrounds the discussion on feminine subjectivity (and its place in the social order) and reaffirms the ability of the individual to escape the discursive "homo-hegemony" that is characteristic of the *Trujillista* city through writing.

In the forties, Cartagena had close ties with La Poesía Sorprendida, considered by many critics the most important group in Dominican literary history. The homonymous magazine published from 1943 to 1947 introduced the reading public to the works of Franklin Mieses Burgos, Mariano Lebrón Saviñón, Rafael Américo Henríquez, Manuel Llanes, Manuel Valerio, Manuel Rueda, José Glass Mejía, as well as texts by the Chilean Alberto Baeza Flores and the Spanish painter Eugenio Fernández Granell. Cartagena was the only female writer to publish in the magazine. Andrés L. Mateo summarizes the aesthetic program of La Poesía Sorprendida in the following terms:

The clearest aspect of the postulate of the *Sorprendidos* – "Poetry with universal man" – bears witness to the fact that their position was not an escape from temporality, which would have entailed an open rejection of the socio-political conditions in which they lived and thus involved a certain danger given the characteristics of the regime of Trujillo. It rather bears witness to the fact that this evasion conceals its reasons in its thinking, universalizes them, explaining its *raison d'être* in a way that avoided all relation to their environment. (*Manifiestos* 21)

In 1955, Cartagena published her small book of verse, Una mujer está sola.³³ With this work, Cartagena appears to distance herself from the hermeticism and aesthetic impulse that characterized her previous poetry and inaugurates a creative cycle marked by what one could call a politics of experience. In the stage of her career that begins with Una mujer está sola and extends to En la casa del tiempo (1984), her poetry is openly political and acquires iconoclastic features. A reading of "Estación en la tierra" (the first poem of Una mujer está sola) helps to illustrate this critical dimension in the poetry of Cartagena. "Estación en la tierra" [Season on Earth] not only sets the tone for the rest of the collection, but also for all of her literary production henceforth. The tone is dominated by the impetuous affirmation of a female "I" who will control the poetic perspective from beginning to end. Since this poem is central to my interpretation, it is here reproduced in full:

I

No creo que yo esté aquí demás. Aquí hace falta una mujer, y esa mujer soy yo. No regreso hecha llanto. No quiero conciliarme con los hechos extraños. Antiguamente no había despertado. No era necesario despertar. Sin embargo, he despertado de espalda a tus

discursos, definitivamente de frente a la verídica, sencilla y clara necesidad de ir a mi encuentro.

[I do not think that I am superfluous. They need a woman here, and I am this woman. I do not return as a woman reduced to tears.

³³ Aída Cartagena Portalatín. *Una mujer está sola*. 1955. *Obra poética completa*. Santo Domingo: Biblioteca Nacional, 2000.

I do not wish to reconcile myself to strange facts. In the past, I had not yet awoken. Waking up was not a necessity. Nevertheless, I have woken up with the back to your speeches, once and for all facing the true, simple and clear necessity to go to my encounter.]

Ahora puedo negarte. Retirarte mi voto. Y puedo escuchar y gritar conmigo irremisiblemente viva, porque viva es la voz de las verdades, porque viva es la voz del luminoso salón del casamiento del ángel con la estrella.

[Now I can disown you. Take back my vote of support and I can listen and shout, unforgivably alive, because the voice of truths is alive because the voice of the luminous parlor of the angel's wedding to the star is alive.]

Ahora puedo negarte.
Toda soy de ventanas,
limpia, libre y clara de frente al campanario
de los oficios de los vivos y de los muertos.
Y siento la necesidad de las cosas pequeñas,
de esas cosas pequeñas que no trepan
como si tuvieran medido el sitio,
sino que se esparcen como los árboles ardidos.

[Now I can disown you I am made of windows clean, free and clear facing the belfry of the trades of the living and the dead and I feel the necessity of small things of those small things that do not climb as if they had measured the place, but that spread like burnt trees.]

Con esa pequeñez me desplazo por tu arquitectura de galería sin fin,
-siempre sin novedad, ni rosa, ni luna en su caminoy llego al fondo donde te descubro
en esas generaciones de familias inmovilizadas
que terminan con la última viga anciana
cuando ya no hay otro dueño y el mueble está

[With this triviality I move around your architecture, a gallery without end,

- always without novelty, without a rose, nor a moon in its path -

and I arrive at the end where I discover you amongst these generations of immobilized families, who come to an end with the last elderly beam when there is no other owner left and the furniture is worn out.]

II

gastado.

Esa infeliz dignidad de la rutina está en el término donde la tontería tiene la voz de la caricias para llamar a las bestias y no significa nada para la voz de mis verdades.

[This unhappy dignity of routine is located at the end where stupidity has a caressing voice, calling the beasts,

and is of no importance to the voice of my truths.]

Pensarán que he llegado demasiado temprano, acaso un poco tarde. Tal vez no hubiera llegado a ningún otro tiempo para reemplazar mi turno.

Pero no creo que yo esté aquí demás, y además prefiero estar aquí ahora, y desatarme a veces, y recoger las negaciones para volver con la resignación, el grito, y el paso de la muerte. Esto es regresar al sitio donde los árboles rechazan a los desconocidos y se prolonga el conversar de algunas estaciones.

[They will think that I have arrived too early, maybe a little late. Maybe I could not have arrived at any other moment to take my turn. But I do not think I am superfluous, and I also prefer to be here now, and to untie myself, and to gather the denials in order to come back with resignation, with a shout, and the passing of death. This is returning to the place where trees reject strangers and the talk of some seasons carries on.]

Esto es ser como los otros y volver mi alma vecina igual a la de los vecinos, y perder el temor de atravesarme totalmente con el recuerdo del libro del recuerdo.

[This is being like others and making my neighboring soul the same as that of the neighbors and losing the fear of immersing myself in the memory of the book of memory].

Ш

Prudentemente he cerrado el camino y he dicho: estoy en tiempo puro. Un tiempo en que la vida ha perdido el sentido. Un tiempo que revela que la naturaleza De las cosas está al revés de su corteza y el alimento consiste en el estímulo. Estación de verdad que me incorpora y rechaza el propósito de descubrir el Código que sentencia la vida detrás de tu cortina. (103-105)

[Prudently I have closed the path and I have said: I exist in pure time. A time when life has lost its meaning. A time that reveals that the nature of things is contrary to their shell and that food consists of encouragement.

The season of truth that lives in me and rejects the desire to discover the law that dictates the life behind your curtain.]

The female voice's declaration of agency in the first couple of lines activates a process of realization. This results in her rupture with ideological patterns of normalization, something that becomes clear when the poetic subject repeatedly refers to having "woken up" from a sort of trance that had impeded her development as an individual. In Cartagena's text, this oppressive force consists of unnamed precepts that one must break.

One might here refer to Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938), a collection of essays written when the war was imminent. In the essay, Woolf launches a devastating critique against patriarchal society. In her argument in favor of "the daughters of educated men," Woolf offers a re-interpretation of what is understood by "atmosphere:"

Atmosphere plainly is a very mighty power. Atmosphere not only changes the sizes and shapes of things; it affects solid bodies, like salaries, which might have been thought impervious to atmosphere [...]. Atmosphere is one of the most powerful, partly because it is one of the most impalpable, of the enemies with which the daughters of educated men have to fight. (228)

Woolf's notion of "atmosphere" as an imperceptible force coincides with the notion of ideological "interpellation" that Althusser would develop three decades later. In Cartagena, the rupture with this impalpable enemy activates a process of internal conscientization, which results in a critique – even if oblique – of *Trujillismo* as an ideology and especially of its colonization of subjectivities. The poetic speaker reaffirms her decision to escape the "routine," that is to say, to push aside the precepts that this order imposes on individuals. In

³⁴ Derrida uses the concept of "identification" to refer to this intangible power that Woolf calls atmosphere and Althusser ideology: "No, an identity is never given, received, or attained; only the interminable and

recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject" (224).

indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures" (*The Monolingualism of the Other* 28). Judith Butler, on the other hand, approaches the same topic by invoking the concept of "recognition": "I can only say I' to the extend that I have first been addressed, and that address has mobilized my place in speech; paradoxically, the discursive condition of social recognition precedes and conditions the formation of the subject:

this regard, the image of the belfry – with its connotations of immobility and old age associated with the doctrinal - has the effect of emphasizing the liberty of the poetic subject to organize her interior geography according to her own will and without the restrictions of this superior order that is disowned. In other words, in the existential logic of the poetic subject, regulated routes are disregarded. The last verses of the poem underline the resultant instability and spontaneity characteristic of a reality where contingent displacements are the norm. The allusion to the moral bankruptcy of the "código" that insists on its fixed nature is revealing. It would appear that the latter has lost its coercive impulse - its status as law - in the formation of subjects. In the poem "Palabra v expresión," the critique of this law is even more direct: through an apostrophe to her "friends" (poets and fellow citizens), it seeks to instill them with the consciousness of dissent and the affirmation of individuality: "Amigos: Es absurdo pasar años aquí con la/ conciencia muda/ y negarse a introducir en la intimidad/ la palabra primera" [My friends: It is absurd to spend years here with a mute consciousness and to deny oneself the ability to introduce the first word into personal life](114). This impulse towards realization through the poetic word is even more obvious in the following verses from the poem "Rechazo tu voz" [I reject your voice], in which the speaker alludes to the fact that she no longer speaks for herself alone, that she is inhabited by a crowd: "Aparta tu voz. Voy a reconstruir mi provincia y será una isla de recuerdos [...]/ Todo porque existe un pueblo en mi pecho/ un pueblo precipitado como la sed, que espanta tu voz/ y la rechaza en ceniza" (116) [Remove your voice. I am going to reconstruct my province and it will be an island of memories [...]/ I do all this because in my chest a people exists, a people hurried like thirst, a people that frightens away your voice and rejects it in ashes.]

These examples have enabled me to identify in Cartagena's poetry a will to lay siege to the standardizing systems of knowledge of the archive. In the next chapter, I will examine the island's literature from the eighties onwards, focusing on the narrative of Aurora Arias and Rita Indiana Hernández and the poetry of Manuel Rueda. These three writers contribute to a critical perspective that confronts the cultural establishment more directly than ever before. In the present chapter, I have read the poetry of Hernández Franco, del Cabral and Cartagena as an encoded and subtle critique of the axioms of the *Trujillista* city. In contrast, in the contemporary literary production, this critique appears in the form of an overt and systematic attack on the stagnant ideological order, an attack filtered through the aesthetic prism of postmodernism.

Chapter 4 Un-imagining the Dominican Nation

Despite the longevity of the model of national identity devised under the symbolic control of the *Trujillista* city, literary production from the eighties onwards began to break out of the canons that had been designed to establish a specific cultural identity. This is a literature that was written in the outskirts of the *Trujillista* city and that founds its capacity to resist on its close proximity to the order against which it rebels.

Arguably, this divergent literature carries out an archeology of Dominican knowledge, a task that the post-*Trujillista* intelligentsia was unable to perform. The validity of the theory of *dominicanidad* favored by the advocates of the archive is thus thrown into question. Recent literature produced inside and outside of the island has guided the discussion on cultural identity towards subjects and considerations that were unimaginable in past decades, in particular towards the experience of the diaspora, popular culture, linguistic creativity and sexuality. It thus contrasts with the unchanging structure of *Trujillista* identity. Like the tree-like root evoked by Deleuze and Guattari, the latter can be explained through the "logic of tracing and reproduction:"

All of tree logic is a logic of tracing and reproduction [...]. Its goal is to describe a de facto state, to maintain balance in intersubjective relations or to explore an unconscious that is already there from the start, lurking in the dark recesses of memory and language. It consists of tracing, on the basis of an overcoding structure or supporting axis, something that comes ready-made. The tree articulates and hierarchizes tracings; tracings are like the leaves of a tree. (Deleuze 13)

The literature from the outskirts of the city, on the other hand, mimics rizomatic ramifications in their contingency. Unlike the tracings of the tree-root, rhizomatic models come closer to the changeable nature of the map in their characteristically random nature:

The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group or social formation. (Deleuze 13-14)

Through a close reading of three texts that may be considered emblematic, I seek to examine how the discomfort with the idea of a stable and homogenous cultural identity is voiced in recent divergent literary works. As I argue, they constitute a break with the earlier literary production that, for the most part, used to align itself with the unifying impulse of the *Trujillista* city. An analysis of poems by Manuel Rueda and the narrative texts by Aurora Arias and Rita Indiana Hernández will highlight the problematic nature of all essentialist formulations of *dominicanidad*.

Manuel Rueda: Exorcist of the Insular Body

In Dominican literary history, a place of honor is commonly attributed to Manuel Rueda. Historians and literary critics praise him for his contributions to the group *La Poesía Sorprendida* in the 1940s, as well as for his manifesto for *Pluralismo* in 1974, in which he urged for a poetic renewal. *Pluralismo*'s aesthetic program was formulated during a polemical lecture delivered by Rueda in the National Library. In the lecture, Rueda argued that poetry needed to open itself

up to new interpretative possibilities and that the textual space needed to be expanded by adding more diverse perspectives and elements that would challenge and exceed the traditionally horizontal nature of verse.³⁵ As José Alcántara Almánzar states, "what Rueda was looking for was not a whimsical modification of the form of writing. He wanted to give the reader greater possibilities to participate. What he was looking for was a widening of horizons through new writerly procedures; the updating of poetry through the incorporation of musical and pictoral resources" (333).

In 1998, Rueda again unleashed a fierce polemic that was just as virulent as that of the seventies. This was due to the publication of Las metamorfosis de Makandal, a text that has the making of a lyrical epic. Like Alejo Carpentier's El reino de este mundo (1949), it revisited some of the legendary aspects of the story of Makandal, the notorious eighteenth-century maroon of Saint Domingue. According to Alfred Métraux in his classic study entitled Le vaudou haïtien, Makandal was one of the "precursors of Haitian independence" (38) and the instigator of the most important rebellion against the French colonizers before the Revolution of 1791. He was a houngan, a vodou priest and originally from Guinea. In 1757, he escaped from the plantation where he had served as a slave in order to organize a subversive group that conspired against the colonial order. His strategy consisted of convincing the slaves that he was immortal and of utilizing this belief to establish and sustain his leadership. For some time, he sowed terror amongst the white population of Saint Domingue, by poisoning their food and the plantations' water reserves. He was captured while attending a celebration in a barrack hut and condemned to burn at the stake (38-39).

³⁵ Like all vanguard movements, *Pluralismo* had followers and critics. One should mention Alexis Gómez Rosa, the most outstanding of the movement's younger poets.

Rueda's text closely resembles the aesthetic project of Tomás Hernández Franco in *Yelidá* in two important aspects that relate to the protagonist: firstly, like Yelidá, he is a *mulato* (and thus represents a multicultural identity) and secondly, like her, he possesses an androgynous body. In his text, Rueda composes a space where the elusive subjectivity represented by Makandal is allowed to settle. He does so through a narrative that fluctuates between Haiti and the Dominican Republic:

Macandal. Makandal. Mackandal.
Proteico como tus sonidos. Secreto y rehecho
y revelado como las letras que te forman, nombre de
lo escondido y lo innombrable.
Aquí estás por fin, atrapado en mis cuadernos.
Espíritu de las dos tierras y los cuatro mares,
de los mil vientos que te llevan y te traen
de la existencia al no-ser, del fuego a los
deslumbramientos de tu nada. (9)

[Macandal. Makandal. Mackandal.

Protean like your sounds. Secret and redone and revealed like the letters that form you, name of the hidden and the unspeakable. Here you are at last, caught in my books.

Spirit of the two lands and the four seas, of the thousand winds that take you and bring you from existence to non-being, from the fire to your dazzling nothingness.]

When it was published, the allusion to the figure of Makandal as "the spirit of both lands" was enough to evoke the terror associated with the specter of political unification, as evoked

by traditionalist critics who continue to monopolize the opinions on literary creation in the Dominican press. This superficial interpretation loses sight of the complexities of Rueda's text, which complicates the discussion on the tribulations of the modern subject in the Dominican Republic. The protean character of the poetic subject refutes the possibility of adapting a model of identification to suit him. His constitution as a subject is open to contingency and resists the safety of a structuring axis. Like a rhizome, he is conceived as "a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing" (Deleuze 20).

Initially, the poetic voice boasts having captured Makandal "at last" within the textual boundaries. However, the artificiality of proposing an archetypal national subject soon becomes clear, given that this subject is only ever realized as a discursivity: "estos 'yo' que se intercambian/plurales/ para que unos versos acontezcan" (64) [these plural 'I's take turns so that some verses would be born].

In *Las metamorfosis*, the island is the foundational trope. This characteristic links the text to a long tradition of Hispanic Caribbean literature, in which insularity features as a foundational rhetorical element in the discourse on the nation. ³⁶ In the poem, the island is an unstable figure and marked by the sign of chaos: "Libro de las fronteras es éste, anverso y reverso de una geografía enloquecida" (10) [This is a book of borders, the obverse and reverse of a geography gone mad]. The motif of insularity dominates the first section of the work, which presents us with a truncated cosmogony. It also functions as an introduction to the story of Makandal:

³⁶ For a more detailed exploration of the rhetorics of insularity in the Hispanic Caribbean, see Dara Goldman's *Out of Bounds: Islands and the Demarcation of Identity in the Hispanic Caribbean*. Lewisburg: Bucknell, 2008.

¡Oh pequeñez caída sobre un costado del planeta! Tierra tan preciada que su misma pequeñez desconoce ¿Qué puedes tú decir sobre estas formas que son medidas puras de lo que no ha podido ser o fue antes de que se impusieran a la luz? (11)

[Oh, triviality fallen on one side of the planet! A land so valued that it does not know its own smallness what can you say about these forms that only measure what could not be or was before they imposed themselves upon the world.]

The fact that insular geography is described in terms of its changeable topographical condition coincides with the unfinished character that myth attributes to the figure of Makandal. The island comes to be identified with a mirage: "¿Dónde tu cuerpo/ en este meridiano en el que te vemos/ espejear" [Where is your body in this meridian, in which we see you reflected] (12). In this group of poems (which functions as the preamble to Makandal's story), the image of the island symbolizes the "house" of the nation that is being founded: "¿Cómo sobrevivir entonces/ si aún no hemos nacido/ si aún somos el pretexto:/ una señal de días venideros?" [How to survive if we have not been born yet, if we are still only the pretext: a sign of future days] (12-13).

Like the character Yelidá in the homonymous poem by Hernández Franco, Makandal embodies the ideal of androgynous perfection represented in vodou through the fusion of the god Damballah-wèdo with his divine spouse Aïda-wèdo (who in *Las metamorfosis* is named "Anaïsa," her name in Dominican vodou): "Yo el fuerte Makandal/ ¡soy Anaïsa!" [I, the strong Makandal, am Anaïsa] (46). Further on, he writes: "Tú no eres negro ni eres blanco./ De qué color serías/ Makandal de todos los colores." [You are not black nor white. Of which color would you be/Makandal of all colors] (57). In the vodou pantheon, Damballah-wèdo is known as the "snake-god" and amongst his attributes features the ability to live in trees and in water (Métraux 92). The island, as a stage on which Makandal appears, acquires the amphibian, undefined nature of the subject who inhabits it: "Tú no eres negra ni blanca/ ala de todas las costas/ de este batracio que se ha creído isla" [You are not black nor white/ wing of all coasts/ of this batrachian that thought it was an island] (61). The poetic counterpoint between the figure of Makandal and the island highlights their symbiotic relation.

There are moments in the text when the history of Makandal is interrupted by metadiscursive interventions that appeal directly to the protagonist and express a search for internal peace as the narrator is forced to face his own existential uncertainty: "Yo te rezo Makandal para que me liberes del otro/ y de mí/ para que me poseas liberándome de querer ser yo/ o ser nadie" [I pray to you Makandal that you liberate me from the other/ and from me/ that you take me, liberating me from wanting to be me/ or be nobody] (62). In the eyes of the narrator, Makandal turns into the potential liberator of identity.

The positive representation of Makandal is further enhanced in the rest of the text through a comparison of him with an array of animalized social types. In the threatening space of the city represented in the section "El gran desfile" [the big parade], for instance, the rat serves to represent the stereotypical Dominican politician:

La rata nacional de pie sobre su ratonera la rata de bicornio la rata tartamuda la rata epiléptica la rata ciega. ¿Qué podemos hacer con tantas ratas de minucioso tránsito por los pasillos de Palacio? (94)

[The national rat stands on the trap the rat with its bicorn the stammering rat the epileptic rat the blind rat.

What can we do with so many rats that meticulously travel through the corridors of the palace?]

The mention of the "rat with a bicorn" and the "blind rat" allude, of course, to Trujillo and Balaguer, who are used as cardinal reference points for exposing the fraudulent nature of a uniformly conceived national identity. The allusion may be read as a denunciation of the persistent power that they represent and its repercussions in the morphology of Dominican culture. Through the rat, this power acquires a face. It is worth emphasizing that in the poem the supremacy of this dominant symbolic field is expressed through its ubiquity, something further intensified by the fact that the rat does not prowl over the surface of the city, but rather roams through its subterranean ins and outs. In other words, panoptic power (a mode of power that governs subjects by submitting them to a rigid system of self-control that is based on their certainty of being under surveillance at all times) is located underground in this spatial metaphor:

De noche con las orejas pegadas a las cloacas de la urbe podemos oír su canto sus chillidos patrióticos que ascienden como una ola de esperanza al corazón de todos. (95)

[At night, with the ears stuck to the sewers of the metropolis we can hear their patriotic song like a wave of hope rise up to the heart of us all.]

The fact that the rats are underground and that they are here problematically associated with hope is significant since one normally assumes that it is underground that resistance can be realized; that hope is found underground. However, the rats usurp both "hope" and the underground space.

Makandal is reluctant to be seen as representative of the Dominican subject, not only of the type of identity prescribed by dominant culture but of any group identity: "¿Y a quién pertenecerle/ yo que no tengo señas de identidad...?" [And to whom should I belong/ I who have no signs of identity?] (108). Thus, he demolishes the myth of the existence of a "national character" and destabilizes the folkloric approach to Dominican culture.

This critical attitude towards the national ethos also manifests itself through the utopian inflections of Rueda's text. "Utopia" in *Las metamorfosis* is not limited to the symbol of the island (understood as the utopian sphere *par excellence*). Rather, its central feature is not geographical but consists of the subversion of nationalist teaching. In *Utopian Lights*, Bronislaw Baczko explains the "utopian function" as a discursivity that pulls away from the territory of ideology to

construct an alternate reality that is plausible only as a prospect: "Utopian discourse is never closed in on itself. The frontiers of utopia are mobile [...] It draws from the collective imagination by exploiting old myths; it establishes itself in the realms of knowledge and ideology by opening up an imaginary time-space for itself" (x). Fernando Ainsa considers the drive towards the investigation of social reality as one of the multiple forms in which utopia can manifest itself. In Ainsa's terms, Baczko's definition would correspond to the "utopias of reconstruction," understood as a "social and political critique of an existing order that functions as a starting point for the proposition of an alternative model of society" (46). As we can see in the final passage of the text, Rueda's aesthetic project corresponds to this definition of utopia as opening up a different space or alternate model:

Así digo tus resguardos para que te disuelvas en el aire de todas estas noches que me rozan, a mí, el desconcertado, que ha escrito este libro del comienzo y del fin para dejar un testimonio de todo lo que había de ser [...] y que no ha sido. (214)

[Thus I shelter you so that you would dissolve into the air of all these nights that surround me – me, disconcerted author of this book of the beginning and the end to leave a testimony of all that should have been [...] but never was.]

Through his representation of Makandal, Rueda digs deep into Haitian national mythology and employs one of its foundational myths in order to problematize the presumed homogenous nature of Dominican cultural identity. The flirtation with cultural forms from the neighboring country might be read through the lens of Laclau's argument that "there is no way that a particular group living in a wider

community can live a monadic existence – on the contrary, part of the definition of its own identity is the construction of a complex and elaborated system of relations with other groups" (48). Through his continuous movement across a painfully unreal island, the character of Makandal dramatizes this inevitable interdependence and simultaneously insists on the critical impulse associated with utopia.

Subversive Cartographies in Contemporary Dominican Narrative by Aurora Arias and Rita I. Hernández

The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (11)

Arguably, the wittiest contemporary interpretation of the modern city is found in *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino. The above quote presupposes the objectivity of the city as a text, as an object that possesses its own jargon. In other words, according to Calvino's description, the urban surface is structured in the manner of a language. In keeping with this axiom, the previous chapters set out to unravel the semiosis of the deep-rooted control that I call the *Trujillista* city. As we have seen, this all-inclusive space possesses both physical and symbolic dimensions. It is thus necessary to speak of "a dominant cultural logic or hegemonic norm" (Jameson 6), one that is easily discernible in Dominican culture.

Describing the urban space as "a meditation amongst meditations," Henri Lefebvre explains the way in which this space operates in the constitution of individual subjectivity:

The city is a mediation among mediations. Containing the near order, it supports it; it maintains relations of production and property; it is the place of their reproduction. Contained in the far order, it supports it; it incarnates it; it projects it over a terrain (the site) and on a plan, that of immediate life; it inscribes it, prescribes it, writes it. A text in a context so vast and ungraspable as such except by reflection. (101)

Lefebvre's explanation can be related to the Trujillista city and its role as colonizer of subjectivities, as it imprints them with the national ideal. In his reading of Tomás Hernández Franco's essays, Diógenes Céspedes offers a precise description of this form of domination. Céspedes emphasizes Hernández Franco's anxiety to reassert Trujillo's desire to achieve a "cultural unity" that would coincide with economic and political unity. But, as Céspedes states, "there is no unity in politics, in economics and the culture of a nation. There is only difference and contradiction. The ideology of Trujillista discourse shows us coherence, but the practices of the subjects struggle to refute this illusion" (Lenguaje y poesía 267). The ideological tension Céspedes describes in reference to the years of the dictatorship can also be discerned in the present. The legacy of the dictatorship has survived into the present despite small variations due to changing historical conditions. In the contemporary period, a disjuncture has arisen between the paradigm of cultural identity propagated by the Trujillista city and a different city, marked by the intertwining of conducts, discourses and heterogeneous levels of communication. In other words, there surfaces "a

migrational, or metaphorical, city" (de Certeau 93) that defies the politico-cultural, totalizing project of *Trujillismo*. Within the boundaries of this new city, every identitarian proposal of a communal or national character loses its validity as a form of social cohesion. Néstor García-Canclini talks about "global cities," a new configuration in the urban space. The notion of "geographical and geocultural" location becomes more complex, given that these cities "are not areas that are demarcated and homogenous, but spaces of interaction in which identities and feelings of belonging are formed from material and symbolic resources of local, national and transnational origin" (*Globalización* 165).

Thematizing the space of the city and its complicated socio-cultural networks, contemporary Dominican narrative employs the metaphor of the metropolis as a laboratory in which we experiment with the possibility of a political utopia. The latter is represented as an open field that includes diverse subject positions. This open form of conceiving the urban space has the effect of altering the immutable socio-historical structure of Trujillismo as an ideology and of challenging its prolonged influence on the formation of identities. Contemporary Dominican narrative thus lays claim to a political dimension. Today, there are many texts that openly set out to go beyond the Trujillista city without falling into its established patterns of interpretation. As I hope to demonstrate, the narratives of Aurora Arias and Rita Indiana Hernández participate in this questioning by proposing a redefinition of the Dominican subject, a project that also necessitates the rewriting of Dominican history.

Arias and Hernández belong to the group of narrators that began to publish in the nineties. In the Dominican Republic, none of these authors has received much attention, whether in academia or journalism. It is not difficult to relate this silence to their texts' characteristic impulse to undo the traditional mapping of Dominican identity. Their texts thus

powerfully exemplify the subversive strand in Dominican literature.³⁷ I will examine their iconoclastic position through a detailed analysis of stories from Arias's *Invi's Paradise y otros relatos* (1998) and *Fin de mundo y otros relatos* (2000) and of Hernández's first novel, *La estrategia de Chochueca* (2000).

In the work of Arias and Hernández, it is the city of Santo Domingo that features as the protagonist. The city functions simultaneously as the referent and the fundamental axis for the subjects that inhabit it and that articulate their subjectivity in an intimate, interdependent relation with the urban space of Santo Domingo. There are nevertheless marked differences between their respective modes of representing the realization of individual subjectivity.

Arias's stories are situated in the Dominican capital of the eighties, a moment in history when large sectors of society were struggling to make ends meet as a result of the austerity measures introduced by the government in response to pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and its politics of toughening the norms for loan negotiations with Latin American countries. During this decade, the middle class almost disappeared and legal and illegal emigration (mostly to New York and Puerto Rico) reached a new high.³⁸ With this disheartening background to her stories,

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³⁷Aurora Arias's stories are compiled into two books that were published abroad: *Invi's Paradise y otros relatos* (Santo Domingo: n.p., 1998) and *Fin de mundo y otros cuentos* (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2000). The first edition of Rita Indiana Hernández's *La estrategia de Chochueca* (Santo Domingo: Riann, 2000) was self-published. The second edition of this novel was published by the Puerto Rican editorial Isla Negra in the year 2003.

³⁸ Contrary to the migratory movement of the preceding decade that had mainly been motivated by political repression, the self-exile of thousands of Dominicans during the eighties had economic origins. Jorge Duany, Luisa Hernández and César Rey have authored the most informative analysis to date on Dominican emigration to Puerto Rico entitled *El Barrio Gandul: economía subterránea y migración indocumentada en Puerto Rico* (San Juan:

Arias chooses to let her texts unfold in two neighborhoods of the Dominican capital (with only few exceptions): the *barrio* of the *Invi* located in the West end of Santo Domingo and the part of the city known as *Ciudad Nueva* (actually one of the oldest despite its name). These neighborhoods serve as the scenery for various characters that take turns at being protagonists.

Most of the stories take place in El Invi, a building project in one of the newer neighborhood. Its popular name derives from the governmental institution that completed the construction: the Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda (created in 1961 by the government of Balaguer). As Sintia E. Molina points out, in the beginning, El Invi had been a housing project for "public employees, [the] lower middle class and [the] military" (2). Arias's stories recreate life in the condominiums and evoke the excessive urbanism of the eighties (even if this particular housing development stems from a previous decade). El Invi of the eighties can be described as a motley territory, in which different social classes intermingle. It signals a total absence of urban planning. But it is even more important to understand that El Invi is a synecdoche for the cityscape of post-dictatorship Santo Domingo (which was shaped by efforts to accelerate the access to modernity) and its precarious socio-cultural reality.

"Cuaresma" [Lent], one of the stories included in the second book of stories by Arias, similarly offers an accurate impression of the cityscape of those years. The protagonists, Irena and Joshti, are on a walk through the park Mirador, located in the centre of the city and constructed in the

Universidad del Sagrado Corazón, 1995). For an extensive treatment of the emigration of Dominicans to New York and other American cities, one may consult the sociologist Ramona Hernández's study: *The Mobility of Workers Under Advanced Capitalism: Dominican Migration to the United States.* (New York: Columbia UP, 2002).

"period of the 12 years" of Balaguer's presidency (1966-1978). In fact, the story in question alludes directly to the political *caudillo* when the park Mirador is described as a place "where the boys of the press hassle a blind ex-president with their questions. An ex-president who is perennial like a mummy" (*Fin de mundo* 9). The mention of Balaguer might appear insignificant if one is not aware of the historical resonances: during the eighties, the political opposition used to hold improvised press conferences during its long daily walks through this park. Naming Balaguer means confronting this figure of Dominican history with the surrounding urban reality — "a place in ruins" (9) — which Irena and Joshti scan from their marginalized position:

For a long time, both remained buried in the distance, looking at different things.

In the South, facing their distracted bodies, a hollow full of factories, residences, miserable hovels,

³⁹ During these three four-year periods of Balaguer as president, the left was violently eliminated and journalists were persecuted and assassinated (this political repression was especially virulent during the seventies). The most talked-about case of political repression is the assassination of the journalist Orlando Martínez in 1976, an event that still echoes in popular consciousness today. Martínez was outraged by the fact that the painter Silvano Lora was arbitrarily denied entry into the country by the government and strongly criticized Balaguer (to the point of urging him to give up the presidency). Two weeks later, the journalist was found assassinated. In Memorias de un cortesano, Balaguer left a blank page, explaining that it would be filled after his death with the details on the case of Orlando Martínez by a trusted friend: "This page is inserted as an empty space. For many years it will remain mute, but one day it will speak, so that its voice will be taken in by history. Mute, like a tomb whose secret will come to light with screams, accusing, when the time allows to lift the tombstone under which the truth lies. Its content is left in the hands of a friend who for reasons of age is supposed to survive me and who has been put in charge by me to make it public some years after my death" (333).

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buildings and condominiums stretching all the way to the wide sea.

In the South-East, the chimneys of a refinery, the noise of strange flying metal, murderous trucks, the rotten smell of the incandescent coast stained with petrol and contamination.

Along this same path, the beaches of the resort of Haina, 40 which has a long record of drowned vacationers and students who had taken their chance with this sea that is made inch by inch in its own image.

To the east, the *Ciudad*,⁴¹ full of people who work, sigh, move about, travel, migrate and become obsessed, because isn't the City an obsession? (*Fin de mundo* 40)

This cityscape in ruins is indicative of the social cost of the development of the seventies and eighties. Balaguer's measures of removing thousands of poor families (without relocating them) had impoverished the city and transformed it into shanty towns (especially in the Northern part). Adding to this, there was a sustained migration from the countryside to the city during the first half of the seventies, when the Dominican Republic had the highest economic growth rate among all of the Latin American countries. In 1978, when Balaguer was forced to hand over power due to accusations

⁴⁰ Haina is the name of a river five miles West of the city. The most important freight port of the Dominican Republic is located at the estuary of the Haina river. Haina is also the name of a settlement on its Western bank.

⁴¹ This refers to *Ciudad Nueva*, built in 1919 to the South-East of the historic heart of the city. As Frank Moya Pons points out, the name of *Ciudad Nueva* stems from it being "the first neighborhood of wooden houses constructed outside of the old colonial city that had stayed within the walls for four hundred years" ("La capital" 6).

of electoral fraud, the new government (presided by Antonio Guzmán) opted for a different strategy that emphasized the development of the rural areas to the detriment of the urban zones. This decision, in conjunction with the grave economic problems that the Dominican Republic experienced under the government of Guzmán and his successor Salvador Jorge Blanco (from 1982 onwards), resulted in a significant deterioration of the quality of life in the Dominican capital (especially amongst the middle class that almost disappeared over the course of the eighties).

It is this city bearing the marks of the socio-economic crisis that is observed by the unperturbed characters Irena and Joshti. From the point of view of urban development, as well as on a symbolic plane, this city is still marked by the former totalitarian order from which it was supposed to have detached itself after Trujillo's death. One could describe this situation as a "lucid chaos," to employ a verse by the Argentine poet Roberto Juarroz. 42 Chaos is here represented by spatial improvisations in the urban development that confront the meticulously regulated traditional space that seeks to impose itself as a unifying symbolic system. In "Cuaresma," it is Irena who emphasizes the significance of this ordered symbolic city, represented as being just as important as the real, dis-ordered city: "If we were innocent and frivolous like a flying kite, of how many thousands of other things would we not also be capable?" (41). Irena's reflection on an impossible levity contrasts with the difficulty of transcending historical memories that re-emerge like a burden in the text when it comes to negotiating identity. Like all the other characters in Arias's narrative universe, Irena reacts to this by seeking alternative spaces of enunciation.

One of these spaces of subversion is found in Arias's first collection in the story "Museum of Disorder" in one of

⁴² Roberto Juarroz. *Poesía vertical*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1996. 68.

the apartments of *El Invi* that Irena shares with López and their infant:

-Look at our Museum of Disorder down there, said Irena, pointing at the hollow, and in the hollow was the neighborhood, and somewhere in that neighborhood was the large window that opens onto her balcony. (*Fin de mundo* 40)

Their apartment is the meeting place for a small group comparable to the "Serpent Club" in Rayuela (published as Hopscotch in English). The "Museum of Disorder" challenges the status quo. It consists of alienated individuals who seek to wrest from the grasp of the Trujillista city a space of freedom, from which they would be able to sight other possible symbolic systems. Thus, in another story called "Invi's Paradise" (the text that lends its title to the collection), Irena describes the Museum of Disorder as the "seat of our hallucinations, joys and despairs" (Invi's 13). This combination of contrasting feelings added to the evocation of inexistent realities does not bestow upon the Museum of Disorder the characteristics of a utopian space (in the sense of possessing an analogical relation to the social whole). Instead, it may be described as a "heterotopia," a "materialized utopia," as Foucault defines it in "Of Other Spaces":

Utopias are sites with no real place [...]. There are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces [...]. There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places... which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real

sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. (24)

The Museum of Disorder is not the only heterotopic space in Arias's narrative. There is another instance of a heterotopia that is even more important for my reading of her work as a critique of the rigid cultural system, namely "Invi's Paradise." The location of this heterotopia in urban topography could not be more allegorical: it is a cave located amongst the reefs of the *Malecón*. Consider how the narrator of "Invi's Paradise" describes the discovery of this "paradise:"

On the 30 de Mayo highway, close to the barrio, they discovered the lung of the waters. One solitary ventilation shaft, one of the secrets that the immense sea guards best. That's where the waves of the Caribbean sea break, this sea, good God, so much sea [...]. Inside the cave, Behique⁴³ and Terror break into screams and songs, checking that no one could see them or hear them on the surface. (13)

⁴³ In Taino, the word "behique" refers to an individual who fulfils the functions of a clairvoyant and healer. The word is documented for the first time in *Relación acerca de las antigüedades de los indios* (1498), by Brother

first time in Relación acerca de las antigüedades de los indios (1498), by Brother Ramón Pané: "There are some men, who practice amongst them, and they are called behiques, and they deceive, as we will explain later on, in order to make them believe that they speak with them [the dead], and that they know all their deeds and secrets; and that, when they are ill, they would make them better, and thus they deceive them" (24).

The mention of "Terror" is significant. In fact, Terror appears as a character in several of Arias's texts and in some others he is alluded to surreptitiously. "Terror" is the artistic name of Luis Días, a well- known Dominican musician, composer and anthropologist, who moved to New York in the mid-eighties. Días helped to recuperate a large part of the musical heritage of the Dominican countryside. Ideologically linked to the radical left during the seventies, Días denounced the repression of Balaguer's government through his songs. In 1976, he achieved great notoriety when he co-organized (with the group Convite) the festival "Seven days with the people," dedicated to the "protest song." Días became an icon for the Dominican youth (especially during the late eighties). Arias recuperates this iconic facet of Luis Días in several of her stories. The best description of Días's influence on the Dominican youth is found in the story "Poco Loco," which takes place in a famous bar of the same name, the seat of the "cream of the alternative people in the city" (Fin de mundo 71). In the story, the narrator writes the following about "Terror:"

All of us who met here shared a common idol, *Terror*, hero of the countryside and the city, the narrator of nights worn out by repression and *bachatas*. With the lyrics of his songs, with his music and the swinging of hips, he managed to make us feel like prisoners in the usual prison. He scratched our dreams, disheveled without mercy the nights of the city. He enchanted the idea of disenchantment. (*Fin de mundo* 71)

In a city where large segments of civil society cannot reconcile themselves with their immediate past, which includes tyranny, democracy, civil war, occupation and the return to authoritarianism, the music of "Terror" opens up a breach amongst "repression and *bachatas*" and mitigates the incessant feeling of disenchantment. In the urban semiology that Arias proposes to bring out, the symbolic terror of previous moments in history is subverted by this other form of "Terror."

In the story "Invi's Paradise," Terror is one of the characters who discover the cave amongst the reefs of the *Malecón*, which becomes their sound-proof laboratory. Conscious of the potential of a place that is simultaneously present and absent from the oppressive symbolic structure that governs the urban surface, the regulars of the Museum of Disorder prepare to consecrate a second heterotopic space:

It was thus that they remembered that beyond what surrounded them (fear and censorship, rubbish bins and disagreements, strikes, the neighborhood, a high cost of living) the city had a sea and a paradise as patio, which some hours later they would take over. (*Invi's* 4)

The consecration of this cave takes place at night to the music of Terror. The rest of the group (Irena, López, Joshti, la Cigua, Carlos, Erica, Sara and F.) serves as audience. Behique accompanies Terror with the bongo, while F. prepares a tea that completes the ritual with which the group members take over the arcadian space of the cave. The tea has a strange effect on the group as something occurs that breaks the liberating and festive atmosphere. They all sight a "Viking ship" that slowly approaches the reefs:

They remained silent. Even Sara remained silent. From the darkest point of the horizon, the ship was moved closer by enormous wooden oars; increasingly moving the entire fury of the sea at its own will, having appeared from who knows what

corner of the past, it was loaded with men who were red and bloody. (*Invi's* 33)

The ship may seem anachronistic but it can be argued that it symbolizes the *Trujillista* machine that moves almost automatically, "at its own will." Not surprisingly, it is peopled by men only, men who are implied to have blood on their hands. If we read the ship in this way, then its appearance on the section of the horizon visible from the cave could be read as an example of what Foucault puts forward as the "fifth principle" of heterotopias. According to this principle, heterotopias are subject to a "system of openings and closures," something that makes them simultaneously inaccessible and permeable:

[...] the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications [...]. There are others, on the contrary, that seem to be pure and simple openings, but they generally hide curious exclusions. Everyone can enter into these heterotopic sites, but in fact that is only an illusion: we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded. ("Of Other Spaces" 26)

Here, the characters think they have found an opening only to be confronted with the closed and exclusive *Trujillista* machine. In the tribulations experienced by subjects in their efforts to colonize particular spaces, Edward Soja sees the effects of society's coercive power on the will of the individual:

Through such forms of spatial regulation the heterotopia takes in the qualities of human

territoriality, with its conscious and subconscious surveillance of presence and absence, entry and exit; its demarcation of behaviors and boundaries; its protective yet selectively enabling definition of what is the inside and the outside and who may partake of the inherent pleasures. Although not mentioned explicitly in "Of Other Spaces," implicit in this heterotopian regulation of opening and closing are the workings of power, of what Foucault would later describe as "disciplinary technologies" that operate through the social control of space, time, and otherness to produce a certain kind of "normalization." (161)

"Invi's Paradise" plays with the possibility of an exit to the mechanisms of control that emanate from the epistemic power of the *Trujillista* city. Nevertheless, in the text, this critical maneuver does not bring about positive results. With the exception of Joshti, the group is astonished by the strange manifestation of power. Joshti is an enigmatic character, described in the text as "the most fragile of beings to visit, live, or spend a night in the Museum of Disorder" (*Invi's* 12). He is the only one who appears to grasp the impossibility of escaping the burden of historical memory that is repeated *ad nauseum*: "[...] what is happening is not that strange, this Viking ship had always been there, Piscis, and it always will be. Forever. Because everything that was continues being," he proclaims pessimistically (*Invi's* 33).

In Arias's text, we find a hyper-consciousness of a past that seems insurmountable despite its fissures. In Rita Indiana Hernández's novel, on the other hand, the past is seen as surmountable. In *La estrategia de Chochueca*, historical memory is pushed off its pedestal. This is a characteristic feature of postmodernity according to Jameson ("The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" 1-54). The character Silvia

dominates the plot from beginning to end. At one point, she returns some loudspeakers that had been stolen from a concert to their rightful owners. This apparently trivial act points us towards the existence of a subterranean Santo Domingo inhabited by subaltern identities. These marginal subjects –the Dominican youth of the nineties from various social strata – strive to make their mark on the urban imaginary while simultaneously escaping through narcotics, orgies, alcohol, music and misanthropy from everyday reality that does not notice them:

[...] they always end up throwing us out from everywhere, not because we were too stubborn. It was something about the way we smiled, as if we splashed those that watched us with an intolerable substance, with our entering into bathrooms in groups of three, with our kissing on the mouths of women and men, with our laughing with the mouth full [...]. (16)

Throughout the novel, the narrator shows an obsessive sociological eagerness to reflect on her surroundings, despite the apparent triviality of her observations. Each adventure in the capital brings about a meditation on the surrounding urban reality and its subjects. There are moments when this gives rise to a cynical stance towards history; the past is summoned up not in order to reconstruct it, but in order to parody it and to erode the importance of the discursive matrix of the nation as monument. The following quote illustrates this tendency in the aesthetic project of Hernández:

The place began to fill up with people around one in the morning, beautiful young boys, still without beard, dancing in this absurd gelatin that our parents had left us, after so much "what do you want," so much "we want the world and we want it," so many historical guffaws, so much Marx and comrade and look where we are now, this jumping up and down of small beasts without any idea, this Mac universe in which you either get knocked down contemplating bubbles on the screensaver or you get knocked down [...]. (words in italics are in English in the original; 73)

The narrator denounces the previous generation, who, in her opinion, should have spread democratic change and thus prevented the "absurd gelatin" of the present. As a result of the nostalgia towards political utopias that never came to fruition, the narrator adopts an attitude that celebrates the loss of historicity in the imaginary of the Dominican youth. The predominant trait of La estrategia, then, is this curious contrast between the typically modern yearning for historical memory and the fragility of history-as-archive in postmodernity. The novel could thus be interpreted as a postmodernist attempt to express the urban reality of Santo Domingo. One might therefore read the novel in a broader context as part of an emergent body of works that consists of recent Spanish and Spanish American narratives, such as Mala onda (1991) by Alberto Fuguet, Esperanto (1999) by Rodrigo Fresán, and Tokio ya no nos quiere (1998) by Ray Loriga. In these texts, history is filtered through random symbolic systems – such as the mass media – which employ it at will as another element in a continuum of aesthetic possibilities. In Ética de la interpretación, Gianni Vattimo describes the manner in which this stylistic appropriation of the past is incorporated into "literary [and] artistic poetics" (26) of a postmodern kind. Vattimo elaborates on the absorption of the past, arguing that it does not respond to the parameters of Hegelianism – of what he calls "historicism of a metaphysical

orientation" (26) – but rather to a will to assimilate the past as an element that is aesthetic and didactic at the same time:

The issue now is not to place oneself in the most adequate and *authentic* position within the course of history [...] but rather to allow the past to become accessible to us, without the use of the logic of linear derivation, and in a mode that is, above all, "stylization," search for *exempla*, in the rhetorical sense of the term. (27)

In La estrategia, history is not a unifying foundational element that — as the logic of the Trujillista city would have it — is assimilated by the nation's individuals. On the contrary, the "monumental past" is only one of the elements in the narrator's cognitive process as she traverses the urban geography (alongside contemporary jargon, the customs of the subculture of the Dominican youth and the products of mass media culture). In fact, the everyday life of this invisible sector of the population exemplifies the type of national subjectivity that Néstor García-Canclini sees as typical of societies of the globalised world:

The definition of a nation, for example, is given less at this stage by its territorial limits or its political history. It survives, rather, as an *interpretive community of consumers*, whose traditional – alimentary, linguistic – habits induce them to relate in a particular way with the objects and information that circulate in international networks. (*Consumers and Citizens* 43)

The characters in *La estrategia* (including the narrator) may be characterized as possessing nomadic subjectivities that accentuate the prevalence of hybridity and fragmentariness in the novel's dynamic plot. This is arguably *La estrategia*'s

strongest feature, especially when the text is read as a counter-narrative to the traditional Dominican knowledge system. The parody of cultural icons, the language of the streets, and the inclusion of popular culture bear witness to the emergence of new popular imaginaries.

La estrategia is also overtly subversive, undermining the dominant discourse on national identity. A revealing example occurs when the narrator describes the fortuitous encounter of a group of tourists with a vendor of Haitian handicrafts:

Then there is the Haitian in the street, who offers them a wooden statuette - better to buy it than to put up with this childish, hateful look that fills your chest with fears, not because of the fact that a neighbor had told me that Haitians ate children, no, I had got over that notion when I had seen them construct half the city with their arms. (17)

Yet Silvia is not consciously political, as she does not seem to understand the irreverent implications of her apparently meaningless, random movements through the city. "The act of walking offers inevitable possibilities: one walks without thinking about walking, we rather jingle the hips, moving the legs to an automatic cadence" (10). What is certain is that this almost reflexive act of walking through the city "transforms each spatial signifier into something else," as Michel de Certeau writes (98).

Certeau's analysis is based on the presumed discursive texture of the movements of urban individuals. It may therefore shed some light on our reading of *La estrategia* as a counter-narrative. For de Certeau, "walking" can be defined as a "space of enunciation" (98). On the physical surface of the city, the walker articulates an always changeable text that is his or her own. Through this continuous displacement, the subject who traverses the urban topography establishes his or

her discursive character, defying the perennial coercion of the symbolic city that is superimposed upon the real city. The signs of Silvia's identity are thus inscribed upon the open text of the city, which is ruptured by the mutability of an ethos that oscillates between the authoritarian echoes of the past and the new order that seeks to go beyond it. This historical conjuncture is represented in the novel in a variety of ways. For instance, the city of Santo Domingo is described as a "labyrinth of fuzz" (18), where the connotations of excess and dirt clearly indicate a process of unfinished purgation. symbolic tension Furthermore. the between antagonistic cities is dramatized through the representation of Santo Domingo as an organism, which is undone and disarticulated daily by individual displacements:

You carry on walking until everything splits again into small unconnected pieces, as always, this is normal... the city should burn but it doesn't, boiling, whistling like a cat, like a medieval oven, with its bed sheet made of mad people and orangutans, of badly tied ties and of transvestites who eat a mango grabbing their boobs, the city blindly burning, breaking into small pieces, undoing its intolerable perfection. (53)

Silvia's agency as an urban walker who undermines the enforced rigidity of the city highlights what Jameson calls the "aesthetic of cognitive mapping" in his analysis of the postmodern moment (51). Jameson's reference can be read in relation to the way in which the subject represents his or her situation in the physical and symbolic space of the city. A "cognitive map," within the context of the urban everyday, would "enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a

whole" (Jameson 51). The characters of *La estrategia* symbolize this form of resistance reserved for the individual in the sphere of micro-politics, thus articulating yet another maneuver to go beyond the confines of the *Trujillista* city. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how such a critique is executed with even greater success in the cultural production of the Dominican diaspora.

Chapter 5 The Migrational Nation

Despite the unprecedented recent success Dominican-American authors in the cultural industry of the United States, Dominican literary criticism tends to ignore their production. Except for texts by Julia Álvarez and Junot Díaz that have been translated into Spanish, the diasporic literary production tends to be met with indifference by the cultural establishment of the island, despite the fact that the majority of Dominican-American authors openly write about the construction of national identity. In the diasporic texts, dominicanidad is articulated outside of the island, generally in the urban space of New York. The inherent hybridization of these texts points towards a different conception of dominicanidad, one that views identity as contingent and hence as responding to the particular context in which it is articulated. From the outset, this creates a rupture with the monologic, institutionalized vision of cultural identity surviving in the island's imaginary. In this chapter, I will read the literary and intellectual production of the diaspora as a "counter-discursive" space that subverts the supposed univocality of the discourse on the Dominican nation and on the subjects that "imagine" the nation in their daily lives.

In this context, Silvio Torres-Saillant's essays are the best example of the theoretical work produced in the diaspora. In the essays, he seeks to disturb the stability of the archive of the *Trujillista* city. Indeed, they constitute a corpus that is singularly convincing in its critique of the political culture that legitimates a uniform *dominicanidad* and in the dismantling of the myths that have perpetuated this interpretation. *El retorno de las yolas: ensayos sobre diáspora, democracia y dominicanidad* (1999) starts out from the premise that this ideology and its definition of national Dominican identity are out-of-date. His critical work therefore has two

goals: on the one hand, it seeks to demythify Dominican culture and, on the other, to work towards the recognition of the diaspora in the configuration of national identity. Both elements are combined in his efforts to formulate a political utopia oriented towards the elaboration of new civic and cultural configurations. Thus, he tries to subvert the reductionist nature of identity politics operative in Dominican nationalism. Yet, despite the fact that his critical project successfully undermines the foundations of the archive as a dominant knowledge system, the new paradigm for democratic action that lies latent in his project displays certain contradictions that I would like to examine.

As part of his advocacy of democratic politics, Torres-Saillant champions the deterritorialization of national Dominican identity, something that would depend above all on the emergence of a true consciousness of "citizenship." For Torres-Saillant, the concept of citizenship relies on a material dimension that is absent in the notion of nationality. The latter is better understood as an entelechy that translates its mythic origins into political terms. The experience of the Dominican diaspora, on the other hand, offers a concrete example of a community that recognizes itself in the positive and supposedly tangible values of citizenship:

From the diaspora, we can give evidence of several aspects that define us as an alternative epistemic community vis-à-vis the cultural discourse and models of self-perception still dominant in the native country. The reconsideration of the defining terms of the nation is important, especially in relation to democratic values. Within this global frame, the diaspora is characterized by the interest to reconcile the abstract concept of nationality with the ensemble of principles realized in citizenship. (96)

Proposing a new model of identity, Torres-Saillant disarms the dominant account on culture and the national subject, pointing to its contradictions and its distortions in relation to the existential condition of the Dominican. According to Torres-Saillant, Dominican nationalism founds its enunciative *locus* on a "negrophobic, phallocratic, anti-popular and Eurocentric vision of what Dominican nationality means" (324). Thus, his critical activity concentrates principally on the disjunction between reality and the cultural myths first elaborated by the nationalist nineteenth-century intelligentsia and later recuperated by the archons of the Trujillista city. Emphasizing the damaging nature of this vision of national identity, Torres-Saillant writes:

Its contemporary followers have continued to reject the majority of our people through their construction of the image of the nation. They have continued to privilege an elite of "whites" of high class and European education that governed the country. Given the shortage of "blanquitos," the attention of our erudite people has concentrated on tearful deliberations on our loss of human capital in different crises throughout the course of our history [...]. In their literary histories Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Abigaíl Mejía, Max Henríquez Ureña, Joaquín Balaguer and Néstor Contín Aybar voiced pathetic lamentations about the white cultured families that left us. (334-335)

When the book came out in 1999, it shook the foundations of the house of the nation and disturbed the calm of its guardians because of its accusatory and often caustic tone. The reception of *El retorno de las yolas* amongst Dominican intellectuals is well illustrated by an article by Giovanni di Pietro, published in the now defunct newspaper *El Siglo*. Di

Pietro coins the term "ethnic elitism" with reference to the discourse of those who, like Torres-Saillant, practice their critical activities from the perspective of the diaspora:

A psychological contradiction is created between his discourse that defends "the poor" and "the disinherited" and his status as privileged intellectual – for they have behind them the political and economic power of their respective ethnic communities, writing from within the "empire." If I am "negrito" and I am with "the poor," how come that I benefit so much from the forbidden fruits of the "empire"? (1)

Given the racist adornments of this quote and the fact that the contradiction that the author denounces actually turns in on itself and may be converted into proof of what he pretends to criticize, di Pietro's comment serves well to underline once more the continued validity of the archive as a space in which cultural identity is forged in an exclusive manner.

Torres-Saillant seeks to articulate a Dominican identity rooted in plurality and thus to weaken the mythic, normalizing paradigms that ensure the continuity of the archive. As he explains: "The diasporic perspective takes root in a theory of the nation – in a reasoning about *dominicanidad* – that questions the official version that has operated in public *criollo* discourse" on the island (398). Torres-Saillant goes even further in his interpretation of diasporic cultural production and argues that it is their positioning on the margins - their diasporic condition - that enables exiled writers and intellectuals to postulate their new democratic politics:

[...] a survey of the writing that the intelligentsia in the United States currently produces – the fiction of Junot Díaz and Julia Álvarez, the critical work of Daisy Cocco de Filippis, the historiography of Francisco Rodríguez de León, the sociology of Ramona Hernández and the theatrical work of Josefina Báez – makes us think that the diaspora hosts a social fervor and a longing for change that find very few parallels in the intelligentsia of the native land. (65)

Torres-Saillant appeals to the experience of everyday reality in the diaspora to ground this ethical stance, which he applies to the forging of a new identity politics. He argues that the subject of the diaspora has guaranteed democratic rights that allow him or her to defy the lettered archive:

[...] the migratory experience of Dominicans outside of the island has equipped them for an interrogation of the body of knowledge that normally constitutes or defines the terms of discussion of who we are as a people. The diaspora has the potential to help to modify the conceptual parameters that still exist in the discourse on dominicanidad. It is this potential that I have chosen to call "el retorno de las yolas" – the return of the yawls. (38)

By naming the potential capacity of the diaspora to influence the debate on Dominican culture "el retorno de las yolas," Torres-Saillant alludes to "El retorno de los galeones" [The return of the galleons], an essay in which Max Henríquez Ureña explains the paradoxical nature of the Spanish-American movement of modernismo, which lay in the movement's potential to impact back upon, and to renew,

Spanish literature. ⁴⁴ As Torres-Saillant highlights, "el retorno de las yolas" "refers to the no less paradoxical phenomenon of Dominicans residing outside of the island, who now attempt to talk back on an equal footing to the society that had expelled them three decades before from the national territory" (393).

For Julia Kristeva, the "foreigner" constitutes "the alter ego of national man, one who reveals the latter's personal inadequacies at the same time as he points to the defects in mores and institutions" (133). Torres-Saillant identifies in his own critical activity a quality of foreignness, analogous in nature to that theorized by Kristeva. In fact, when he comments on the reception of his own writings in the Dominican Republic, Torres-Saillant legitimates himself precisely as a new voice: "I was speaking from the shore, from the intellectual margin, from the premise of otherness to which the *criollo* middle class relegates those who have had to emigrate" (395). When it comes to the definition of national identity, Torres-Saillant reiterates the radical distance that separates the protectors of the order of the archive and the peripheral space of the diasporic intelligentsia:

Maybe from the diaspora it is easier to evaluate and to detect the suicidal element of the negrophobic and genocidal vision of *dominicanidad*. Hence, the epistemological rupture of exiled Dominicans with regard to this discourse that defines the nation and that was generated by *Trujillismo*. (87)

Yet, Torres-Saillant also emphasizes that this "epistemological rupture" has a precedent in the generation of intellectuals

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⁴⁴ Max Henríquez Ureña. *El retorno de los galeones (bocetos hispánicos)* Madrid: Editoral Renacimiento, 1930.

who since the sixties have tried to dismantle the preeminence of nationalist Dominican knowledge:

> We possess a body of knowledge forged by historians, sociologists and anthropologists scholars who broke new grounds in order to inaugurate a democratic and authentic vision of dominicanidad. There is a conceptual arsenal in existence that can be used to displace the Eurocentric, negrophobic and elitist theory on national experience. It so happened, however, that while the new intelligentsia corrected the cultural face of the nation, the government, the press and the other institutions that modulate perceptions, continued to be in the hands of the defenders of the Trujillato. The new body of knowledge shut itself away. It confined itself to the professorial ranks, to academic conferences and circles of initiated readers. Simultaneously, the nineteenth-century cultural discourse re-activated by Trujillismo continued to take over classrooms and to perpetuate itself in the minds of our youth. (338)

Torres-Saillant argues that, under these circumstances, it is the task of the diasporic intelligentsia to consolidate the epistemological rupture with the island's dominant cultural discourse. He begins by dismantling the supposed homogeneity of the politico-cultural body of the nation, arguing that, historically, the debate on *dominicanidad* was limited by its metaphysical framework. Inevitably, identity was thus formulated from an essentialist perspective:

Until now, the discussion on *dominicanidad* carried out in the country has limited itself to the ontological plane. In the interest of pointing out the

constitutive elements of nationality, this emphasis investigation channeled the fundamentally metaphysical lands. They attempted to identify the foundations of our uniqueness as a people and to isolate the patterns that distinguish us from the rest. In this way they tried to arrive at the essence of the spirit of the nation. On account of this type of formulation, conceptual parameters were constructed that lead the conversation to favor one group over the other. The one group, the standard bearer of Trujillista theory and culture, shapes nationality through protocols of exclusion. The other group, linked to the leftist intelligentsia, strives towards a demythification of the definitions of the dominant sector. (37)

In the thirties, Antonio S. Pedreira described the cultural situation of Puerto Rico as a "ship adrift" (43). Torres-Saillant presents the Dominican reality in similar terms when he describes it as a "country that is adrift," a country that "again requires the imagination, but this time to conceive the minute, to visualize the ordinary" (295). The diaspora thus turns into the space from where one can undertake a critique that would reorient the nation into the right direction. The intellectual who writes from this peripheral location can be compared to the "exiled intellectual" as described by Edward Said:

Exile is a model for the intellectual who is tempted, and even beset and overwhelmed, by the rewards of accommodation, yea-saying, settling in. Even if one is not an actual immigrant or expatriate, it is still possible to think as one, to imagine and investigate in spite of barriers, and always to move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins,

where you see things that are usually lost on minds that have never traveled beyond the conventional and the comfortable. (63)

Writing as an exile, Torres-Saillant projects himself as an interpreter qualified to formulate new perspectives on identity. As an alternative space of enunciation, the diaspora enables the dismantling of the version of *dominicanidad* prescribed by the pro-government intelligentsia, as well as the articulation of a national identity based on plurality. The discussion is thus conducted on the plane of everyday-life, the micro-politics of daily living, and it aims to bring about the elimination of "practices that prevent the establishment of an effective democracy" ("Catálogo" 58) in the Dominican Republic. It seeks to stimulate an ethical obligation that would be felt by the individual:

No exaltation of a *dominicanidad* that clings to *Trujillista* obscurantism will ever be in touch with the consciousness of people of good will. Every appraisal of the homeland should praise racial and gender equality, the freedom of expression and worship, consideration for the humble, respect for the workers and solidarity with the disinherited, whether they come from Villa Mella, Washington Heights or Jacmel. Dominican nationality should treasure humanistic values and turn inexorably around the axis of human dignity. (349)

In short, Torres-Saillant's proposal envisions the possibility of a democratic culture, in which individuals can assume their role as citizens without the coercion of an all-embracing state apparatus. This way of conceiving citizenship is related to Néstor García-Canclini's understanding of democratic culture in the context of a globalised world: "A democratic culture is

one that empowers us to be different. And it teaches us to value those who are different and to recognize their difference as legitimate" (*Imaginarios urbanos* 59). Torres-Saillant and García-Canclini share Habermas's conviction that it is impossible for contemporary cultures to survive if they cling to patterns that are invariable: "Cultures survive only if they draw the strength to transform themselves from criticism and secession. Legal guarantees can be based only on the fact that within his or her own cultural milieu, each person retains the possibility of regenerating this strength. And this in turn develops not only by setting oneself apart but at least as much through exchanges with strangers and things alien" (223).

In its orientation towards the future, Torres-Saillant's text carries on the longstanding rhetorical tradition of the Spanish American essay, of which the chronicles of José Martí and Rodó's Ariel (1900) are paradigmatic examples. In fact, Martí's "Nuestra América" (1891) is a recurrent intertext in several essays of El retorno de las yolas. For instance, in "La intelectualidad dominicana ante la crisis nacional: de la apatía a la complicidad" [The Dominican Intelligentsia and National Crisis: From Apathy to Complicity, Torres-Saillant "the tradition of mental colonialism" of Dominican intellectuals, which manifests itself in their eagerness to "evaluate national reality through ways of thinking imported from other realities" (314). Anyone familiar with Marti's text will notice the implicit reference to Marti's ideal of replacing the "European university" with an autochthonous one. Furthermore, "Nuestra América" is also a reference point for his vision of the intellectual as "servant" of his people:

> According to Martí's model, the intellectual should arm himself with ideas to improve society. He should use the word not to delight in his own

conceptual brilliance, but in order to provide knowledge and to illuminate the way. The intellectual exercises a vital function in his community. His work is justified by his ability to reach his interlocutors in society. (289)

The intellectual appears here as the "teacher" or interpreter of the nation's future. Yet, in Torres-Saillant's vision, intellectual work also creates "citizens," subjects that are able to participate actively in civil society: "The idea is to stimulate the emergence of a mentality of citizens and to scorn the vassals, since vassals generate dictators" (313). Torres-Saillant authorizes his critical voice through his poetics of the "intellectual citizen" (298).

However, despite this necessary revision of Dominican identity, his critical discourse is unable to rid itself completely of the conceptual apparatus of the nationalism it criticizes. I am here referring to the fact that his work of unmasking the defects of the nationalist identitarian project is invariably tied to a rhetoric of recovery as it seeks to rehabilitate an essential Dominicanness. For instance, one might here return to the quote I used earlier in the chapter in which Torres-Saillant recognizes his debt to a certain sector of the post-*Trujillista* intelligentsia and reaffirms the necessity of an "authentic" vision of Dominican identity:

We possess a body of knowledge forged by historians, sociologists and anthropologists – scholars who broke new grounds – in order to inaugurate a democratic and *authentic* vision of *dominicanidad*. (338, my emphasis)

An even clearer example of this tendency to emphasize the existence of a defined national identity emerges later on, when the author quotes Juan Pablo Duarte, the principal ideologist of Dominican independence. Torres-Saillant

invokes Duarte when he talks about the urgency to foster "a democracy that enables the popular and plural constitution of the 'Dominican people how it really is" (345). The ideologically charged last part of the sentence catches the eye. It is a phrase that the author borrows from the nineteenth-century patrician: "the Dominican people how it really is." Transferred to the discourse of Torres-Saillant, Duarte's phrase now highlights the materiality of an essence, a way of being that one has to decipher because it is present, even if only in veiled form. Strangely, this "authentic Dominicanness" will be defined according to parameters that refute the very idea of homogeneity, as can be seen in the following assertions when the author sums up his project:

The goal that needs to be achieved in the years to come has to be to help the Dominican people to recognize itself in the *genuine complexity of its being*. Future citizens should be able to see themselves in, and love themselves for, their African and multiracial heritage, the varied manifestations of their spirituality, their shared plurality, their full sexuality, their linguistic *criollidad*, the syncretic nature of their ethnic formation. With the realization of this aim, the mental health and the self-respect of the population will be safeguarded. (324, emphasis added)

In 1979, José Luis González had recourse to a similar rhetorical maneuver in the Puerto Rican context. In his exegesis on cultural Puerto Rican identity in "El país de cuatro pisos," ⁴⁵ González refers to a concrete puertorriqueñidad that is defined by the multiplicity of its constituent elements:

⁴⁵ José Luis González. "El país de cuatro pisos (Notas para una definición de la cultura puertorriqueña)." *El país de cuatro pisos y otros ensayos.* Río

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What sets the Puerto Rican case apart is that for more than half a century we have been peddled the myth of social, racial, and cultural homogeneity which it is now high time that we began to dismantle, not so as to "divide" the country – a prospect that some people contemplate with terror – but rather so as to gain a true perspective on the country's *real and objective diversity*. (14, my emphasis)

González's interpretation of Puerto Rican cultural history and Torres-Saillant's critical writing on Dominican discourse share much common ground. It is obvious that for the latter there exists a true or "genuine" Dominicanness that one can grasp by recognizing the heterogeneous quality of its constituent elements; there exists a "true image of Dominicanness" as he writes elsewhere (91, my emphasis).

So far, we have seen that Torres-Saillant sees the identity of the people as rooted in a "material facet" (37), which has to be given priority in his theorization. Nevertheless, the problem of his reasoning is that while trying to steer away from the ontological dimension of the discourse on national identity that preceded him, Torres-Saillant continues to describe a Dominicanness characterized by the metaphysics of immanence:

What defines the contours of a people's national identity is lived reality; that is to say, shared historical experience. The experience of having lived in a given set of circumstances as a human group is what results in the forging of a national spirit. It is

Piedras, Puerto Rico: Huracán, 1980. Quotes are from the English translation *Puerto Rico: The Four-Storeyed Country*. Trans. Gerald Guinness. Maplewood, N.J.: Waterfront, 1990.

not a language, nor a race, nor a divine mission, as the heirs to certain traditions of German idealism might suppose. (115)

We can thus affirm that the paradigm for democratic action advocated by Torres-Saillant – despite achieving to dismantle the theory of *dominicanidad* upheld by nationalist intelligentsia – is not successful in getting rid of the interpellative effect of this ideology completely. When he asserts the existence of a "real" *dominicanidad* that is called upon to supplant a false vision of it (one that is promoted by political power), he indirectly repeats the symbolic pattern that his critical activity sets out to amend. In other words, in his proposed project of constructing a democratic culture, *dominicanidad* functions as the matrix that structures and creates individuals, since it delimits the contours of a cultural identity that, because of its fixed nature, could be interpreted as homogenous.

It is significant that even Torres-Saillant – who has, in my opinion, written the best deconstruction of the Dominican knowledge system to date - cannot escape the lexicon that belongs to the rhetorico-political technology that he endeavors to disarm. This is even more striking given that his proposal to confine his discussion of national identity "to the evident and measurable plane of citizenship" (37) entails an open and plural form of imagining social reality, something that is without a doubt more in keeping with the Dominican Republic of today's globalized world. Using a formulation that is already a commonplace in cultural anthropology and postcolonial studies, Stuart Hall warns us that the nation as one of the "great collective social ideas" that constitute individual subjectivity is becoming increasingly unstable (44). As we have seen, the critical project of Torres-Saillant swings between proof and refutation of this postulate. One question remains: is it possible to imagine a theoretical

attack on *dominicanidad* without repeating the errors of the epistemological technology that lies behind institutionalized national identity? I have discussed the complexity of this issue over the course of the preceding chapters. We still do not possess adequate critical instruments.

However, a first step towards a new way of conceiving Dominican identity could consist of making use of the particular geopolitical reality inhabited by the exile. This allows for an interpretation of national identity from a more deterritorialized perspective, that is, from a critical distance that would enable us to carry out an investigation of the national imaginary that would be less dependent on genealogical imperatives. It may well be that starting from this necessary distance one could theorize a Dominicanness in which geography would be nothing more than what it "really is": a contingency. Yet, signs of change are not found in intellectual discourse and its theoretical puzzles, but rather in literary texts and mainly in those produced in the diasporic context.

The diasporic literary imagination constructs the subject position of the exile within an imaginary geography. Earlier, I referenced Michel de Certeau's theorizations on the discursive quality of individual movement across the urban surface. The travel through the city in de Certeau's thinking offers further lines of thought. For instance, walking comes to perform the function that used to pertain to the realm of myth, thus creating signification. The difference is that travel through the urban context creates "spaces" rather than legendary histories:

Certainly walking about and traveling substitutes for exits, for going away and coming back, which were formerly made available by a body of legends that places nowadays lack. Physical moving about has the itinerant function of yesterday's or today's

"superstitions." Travel (like walking) is a substitute for the legends that used to open up the space to something different. (106-107)

In Mythologies, Roland Barthes re-defines myth as a "system of communication" (109); anything can potentially become material for myth. In the literature of the Dominican diaspora, it is "travel" that produces a space of signification through an act evocation. There are places that exist only by virtue of the subject's capacity to "speak" of these spaces. As de Certeau writes in a different context, "[i]t is striking here that the places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences. What can be seen designates what is no longer there" (108). Speaking of a space that is an absence means to make it present through an act of speech. When it refers to a space that exists only as a memory (in this case the nation), diasporic literature makes it present through writing and simultaneously inscribes an exilic subjectivity into the margins of the text. This subject thus becomes an integral part of the political body evoked in the process of remembering. In this sense, one can postulate that remembrance activates a double movement in diasporic literature: on the one hand, it produces space and, on the other, it gives form to historical subjects and identities. Of course, in diasporic texts both of these endeavors are inclusive. De Certeau refers to the process of the simultaneous construction of space and subjectivity as the articulation of "the memorable": "The memorable is that which can be dreamed about a place. In this place that is a palimpsest, subjectivity is already linked to the absence that structures it as existence and makes it 'be there,' Dasein" (109).

In his important study Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (1997), James Clifford offers a comprehensive analysis of "diaspora" as a concept. According to Clifford, cultures of the diaspora "mediate, in a

lived tension, the experiences of separation entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place" (255). The literature of the Dominican diaspora displays this "tension," which is common in groups that have come together outside of the geographical or political space that they were forced to abandon, and to which they feel invariably connected through various symbolic kinds of bonds. Clifford explains this process by situating it in the context of "contrapuntal modernity:" "Diasporic discourses reflect the sense of being part of an ongoing transnational network that includes the homeland not as something simply left behind but as place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity" (256). Dominican-American authors show that this contrapuntal dynamic is part of the experience of displaced groups. Its aesthetic expression takes the form of an interchange between the factual here of the host territory and the abstract or imaginary there of the island that is evoked as a discursivity. One of the critical possibilities that the contrapuntal dynamic presents for intellectuals regardless of their location is that of an escape from the theoretical traps inherent in Dominican intellectual discourse on cultural identity.

One anecdote will serve to illustrate my comments. In 2002, Julia Álvarez was the object of a controversial debate amongst writers and intellectuals on the island. The discussion, published in the newspaper *El Caribe*, focused on the Dominicanness of Alvárez and other authors of Dominican origin writing in English and questioned their authenticity. The following week, Álvarez published a reply in which she sought to rehabilitate the ambiguous symbolic space within which she has to distribute her loyalties:

Who are we, the writers with two cultures and traditions? What place lays claim to us? Our resting place is the page; the imagination is our portable

homeland [...]. I am a Dominican-American writer. It is not only a term. I am drawing a country that is not on the map and this is the reason why I am trying to give expression to it on paper. It is a world formed through contradictions, collisions, mixing; and it is precisely this tension and richness that interests me. Being inside and outside of two worlds, looking at one side from the other. ("Ni chicha ni limoná" 5)

Since she burst onto the US editorial market with her collection of poems *Homecoming* (1984), Álvarez has elaborated this particular stance consistently in most of her literary works, a stance that she here elevates to the plane of reflection. However, the most audacious elaboration of the idea of the imagination as a "portable homeland" can be found in her early prose. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) was Álvarez's first incursion into the genre of the novel. My analysis of this work will enable me to illustrate the critical drive that, as I argue, is typical of the literature of the diaspora in general. I aim to show the presence of a new form of "language" that destabilizes traditional forms of thinking culture and politics in the Dominican context, propelling a vision of culture as marked by discursive repertoires that are necessarily hybrid and dialogic.

Like the majority of narrative texts from the diaspora written in English, *How the García Girls* can be read as an effort to express the complex situation experienced by individuals who are forced to move from their place of origin and to settle in a foreign space. Álvarez's novel explores the ambivalent condition of the uprooted. This ambiguity stems from the tension between the different cultural fields that the transplanted subject is forced to negotiate. In short, Álvarez focuses mainly on culture as a conflict-riven space, where identitarian links are forged.

In How the García Girls, the experience of the diasporic subject as inhabitant of divergent cultural spaces is represented through the tribulations of the García family, who for political reasons moved to New York at the beginning of the sixties. The patriarch of the family, Carlos García and his wife and four daughters had to leave the Dominican Republic in a hurry, fleeing from Trujillista repression. García, a prominent cardiologist, was persecuted by security organizations of the State after a failed attempt to remove the tyrant. With the help of Victor Hubbard (an undercover agent harbored by the CIA, who worked as consul in the American Embassy of Santo Domingo), the García family settles in the Bronx. After having enjoyed an opulent life on the island as one of the families of prestigious ancestry, the Garcías end up poor and in exile. The father receives a meager salary from a scholarship for postgraduate studies, which he uses to support his family. Remittances sent by the paternal grandfather (a diplomat in the service of Trujillo living on the island) constitute the only other source of income.

However, in a relatively short space of time, the García family manages to recover at least partially the economic and social status that they were accustomed to on the island. The García sisters are educated in a Catholic school close to their neighborhood and later on in a girls' school on the outskirts of Boston. Their mother Laura, who had been educated in a bilingual college (following the tradition of the island's wealthy class), wants her girls to assimilate rapidly into US society, something she envisions would happen through interaction with the upper class. It is noteworthy that once the García family settles in New York Laura undergoes a radical change. From being a mere silhouette in the narrative, she turns into a voice that transgresses the patriarchal code associated with Carlos and, more broadly, Trujillo. Thus, when the *Trujillista* dictatorship

comes to an end and the father thinks about the possibility of returning, we are given to understand that Laura does not share this wish:

> But Laura had gotten used to the life here. She did not want to go back to the old country where, de la Torre or not, she was only a wife and a mother (and a failed one at that, since she had never provided the required son). Better an independent nobody than a high-class houseslave. (144-145)

The key moment in this transformation from a passive character to an active subject occurs as a consequence of Carlos's reaction to a speech prepared by Yolanda for a school activity. Carlos, who seeks to cling onto his authority, is offended by the lines and forbids her to read the speech. Laura's reaction is immediate:

> Laura's eyebrows shot up, her mouth fell open. In the old country, any whisper of a challenge to authority could bring the secret police in their black V.W.'s. But this was America. People could say what they thought. "What is wrong with her speech?" Laura questioned him. (145)

Laura challenges Carlos by appealing to, and celebrating, the so-called democracy of US Society: "This is America, Papi, America! You are not in a savage country anymore!" (146). Provoked by this loss of control, Carlos rips Yolanda's speech into little pieces. Yolanda reacts by comparing him to Trujillo:

> On her knees, Yoyo thought of the worst thing she could say to her father. She gathered a handful of scraps, stood up, and hurled them in his face. In a

low, ugly whisper, she pronounced Trujillo's hated nickname: "Chapita! You're just another Chapita!" (147)

The father's loss of authority is directly related to the family's absorption of democratic values here associated with US society. Significantly, the passage ends with Carlos buying a typewriter for Yolanda.⁴⁶

Laura García's plan for her daughters' education works out only in part. Carla, Sandra, Yolanda and Sofía have to suffer numerous humiliations because of their accent and because of their Hispanic origin. As the sisters state in one section of the novel that is narrated by all of them together: "we met the right kind of Americans all right, but they didn't exactly mix with us" (108). Eventually, the process of assimilation is completed; the Garcías have assimilated the liberal ideology of the sixties, which is what caused the collision with their father's ways of thinking:

We began to develop a taste for the American teenage good life, and soon, Island was old hat, man. Island was the hair-and-nails crowd, *chaperonas* and icky boys with all their macho strutting and unbuttoned shirts and hairy chests with gold chains and teensy gold crucifixes. By the end of a couple of years away from home, we had more than adjusted. (109)

⁴⁶ In the novel, Guillermo B. Irizarry justifiably identifies the presence of a master code designed to delineate their socio-cultural movement from the backwardness of the island to a more advanced stage associated with the United States: "The coding of this narrative as biographical move from a premodern to a modern space, from a place of repression to a place of liberty, constructs a dichotomy of inferiority/superiority (coinciding with Dominican Republic/United States). This dichotomy is the master code of the García Girls" (3).

The language and imagery employed illustrate the distancing from the home country that has taken place.

Another aspect of the novel one must comment on is its structure. It is organized in three parts that contain five sections each. The novel starts and ends on a section that takes place in 1989, whereas the sections in between go backwards in time until 1956. 47 The first and last sections are narrated by Yolanda, who is the third of the García sisters and in all probability the alter ego of the author. This circular aspect is not only temporal but also spatial, given that the novel begins and ends in the city of Santo Domingo. On the theoretical level, these spatial and temporal shifts can be linked to what Clifford sees as the anti-teleological nature of the diasporic experience: "In diaspora experience, the copresence of "here" and "there" is articulated with an antiteleological (sometimes messianic) temporality. Linear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed, future: a renewed, painful yearning" (264). Yet, even if many voices alternate in the novel, it is Yolanda who unifies the various stories of the other members of the García family as the reader finds out in the final lines of the text. Until this moment, the narration had alternated between Yolanda and her family. Only at the end of the novel does the reader find out that all of the experiences have passed through the filter of Yolanda's memory. By claiming the story as hers, Yolanda - the voice that holds together all the other voices - signals a biographical intent; a private "I" manifests itself, an "I" that is apparently falling apart due to her uprooted condition. In the words of Guillermo Irizarry: "The overall sensation of

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⁴⁷ In relation to the structure of the novel, William Luis has pointed out Julia Álvarez's debt to Alejo Carpentier's short story "Viaje a la semilla" (1944). Please see "El desplazamiento de los orígenes en la narrativa caribeña de Reinaldo Arenas, Luis Rafael Sánchez y Julia Álvarez." *Anales de Literatura Hispanoamericana* 25 (1996): 264-288.

disorganization in the structure of the novel is flattened because the novel takes on the pretense of a biography. At that it works as a logotherapeutic session by travelling to the "root" of trauma" (3). This biographical "pretense" can be read as the manifestation of a diffuse subjectivity gaining access to the territory of writing. The act of writing turns into her only possibility to inhabit a concrete space from which to bring about the recuperation of an absent identity. The certainty of this absence propels Yolanda's will to recuperate what has been lost. The first signs in this new direction emerge precisely during her first years in New York:

In ninth grade, Yoyo was chosen by her English teacher, Sister Mary Joseph, to deliver the Teacher's Day address at the school assembly. Back in the Dominican Republic growing up, Yoyo had been a terrible student. No one could ever get her to sit down to a book. But in New York, she needed to settle somewhere, and since the natives were unfriendly, and the country inhospitable, she took root in the language. (141)

Shutting herself into her room, Yolanda turns to writing as a way to purge herself of the existential dilemma that marked her childhood and that stemmed from the collision, and the required interaction, with her new reality. However, the apparently soothing act of writing also contains a disconcerting paradox that has to do with the idea of writing as *pharmakon*, in the sense that Derrida gives to the term in his writing on Plato. Writing is defined as a potion that is restorative and poisonous at the same time:

This *pharmakon* [writing], this medicine, this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with

all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be – alternately or simultaneously – beneficent or maleficent. (*Dissemination* 75)

Yolanda begins to write with the intent to take root in a space that can offer hold and at the beginning the literary domain appears to resolve her uncertainty by providing this space for definition. Writing momentarily mitigates the suffering that Yolanda never quite manages to understand. The final lines of the novel are revealing in this context:

I grew up, a curious woman, a woman of story ghosts and story devils, a woman prone to bad dreams and bad insomnia. There are still times I wake up at three o'clock in the morning and peer into darkness. At that hour and in that loneliness, I hear her, a black furred thing lurking in the corners of my life, her magenta mouth opening, wailing over some violation that lies at the center of my art. (290)

The "black furred thing" alludes to an episode from her childhood on the island, when she separated a recently born kitten from her mother and then could not bear the meowing of the anxious animal. The image of the cat used to torture her for a long time in her nightmares. However, this "black furred thing" also refers to Yolanda's inability to find an exit from her melancholic condition. She has suffered from it since her childhood in New York as the result of being transplanted to a foreign geo-cultural environment.

Yolanda seeks to get rid of her melancholy through writing. The blank page and her own intention to colonize it (to fill it) become for Yolanda a method to overcome her inner void –"the hollow of my story" (289) – and the aphasic state into which melancholia seems to push her. Yolanda's

impulse to write her "story/history" can be related to the concept of "introjection" developed by Nicholas Abraham and María Torok in psychoanalytic theory. According to Abraham and Torok, the melancholic subject struggles precisely with the dilemma of how to put a void into words: "Introjecting a desire, a desire, a pain, a situation means channeling them through language into a communion of empty mouths" (128). In turn, Walter Benjamin sees the melancholic as plunged into a sort of "contemplative paralysis" (140).

For Freud, mourning and melancholy are separated by a difference of degree. Mourning "is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, and ideal, and so on" (125). The beginning of melancholy is analogous to that of mourning, but it then develops differently: even if the loss that had caused melancholia is recognized, something fundamental keeps hiding deliberately in the mind of the person that suffers from it. In Freud's words:

The patient] knows whom he has lost but not what it is he has lost in them. This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an unconscious loss of a love-object, in contradiction to mourning, in which there is nothing unconscious about the loss. (127)

In the section entitled "Joe" from the first part of the novel, Yolanda is interned in a psychiatric hospital. She ends up separating from her husband and is suffering from a psychological disorder characterized by constant talking: "Her parents were worried. She talked too much, yakked all the time. She talked in her sleep, she talked when she ate despite twenty-seven years of teaching her to keep her mouth shut

when she chewed. She talked in comparisons, she spoke in riddles" (79). The lines that precede this quote allude to the type of illness Yolanda is suffering from, namely a depression that has more to do with the broken nature of her identity than with the failure of her marriage: "Yolanda, nicknamed Yo in Spanish, misunderstood Joe in English, doubled and pronounced like the toy, Yoyo – or when forced to select from a rack of personalized key chains, Joey – [...]" (68). The multiplicity of names dramatizes Yolanda's existential situation, her eagerness to make sense of an unfinished process of internal self-realization. Her name disintegrates once pronounced to highlight the fragmentation of Yolanda as a subject:

"Ay, Yolanda." Her mother pronounced her name in Spanish, her pure, mouth-filling, full-blooded name, Yolanda. But then, it was inevitable, like gravity, like night and day, little apple bites when God's back is turned, her name fell, bastardized, breaking into a half dozen nickname –"pobrecita Yosita – another nickname. (81)

According to Freud, the mechanism of mourning produces the will to resist in a person faced with the loss of a loved object. Yolanda exhibits the condition of mourning, which turns into melancholia because of her ignorance of how this absence affects her. In other words, she becomes a melancholic because of her inability to make sense of her existential condition, which she describes as "my peculiar mix of Catholicism and agnosticism, Hispanic and American styles" (99).

As Walter Benjamin suggests, the melancholic subject turns to the void to compensate for the absence of a lost object and to recover it through memory: "In its tenacious self-absorption [melancholy] embraces dead objects in its contemplation, in order to redeem them" (157). Similarly, the "hollow" that Yolanda suffers from can be related to what Abraham and Torok see as a "crypt" in the psychic space. The crypt is the result of the loved object's loss:

[For melancholics] [t]heir undisclosable idyll was pure and devoid of aggression. It did not end because of infidelity but owing to hostile external forces. This is why melancholics cherish the memory as their most precious possession, even though it must be concealed by a crypt built with the bricks of hate and aggression. (136)

The act of evocation that defines the contours of Yolanda's "crypt" shapes the narration from beginning to end. Memory, in this context, facilitates the retention of the lost object in the chronotopic space of the crypt, which allows for this conjunction of dissimilar temporalities, which one encounters over the course of the narrative. Through remembering others, Yolanda – as a fragmented subject – finds a point of cohesion, a way of confronting the loss, even though she does not manage to understand what this loss entails.

In the closing lines, it appears that Yolanda internalizes melancholy as a positive factor into her psychic make-up. She is, however, unable to claim for herself a subjectivity that would be "compartmental" in nature. In other words, she is unable to access a subjectivity rooted in a particular geographical space or in the romantic idea of a monolithic nation. The vicissitudes of Yolanda's life speak to the arbitrary nature of the context that defines a shifting and multiple subject oblivious to genealogies. Thus, Álvarez's novel illustrates the disadvantages of imagining the space of identity negotiation as a specific and perfectly demarcated cultural field.

There are many other diasporic texts that display representational tactics governed by similar parameters. One might here refer to the stories of Drown (1996) and the novel The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (2007) by Junot Díaz (who won the Pulitzer Prize in fiction), as well as to the novels Geographies of Home (1999) by Loida Maritza Pérez, to Soledad (2001) by Angie Cruz, and to Song of the Water Saints (2002) by Nellie Rosario. In these texts, the theme of cultural ambivalence inherent in the condition of the exilic subject is dealt with from the perspective of the descendents of Dominican immigrants to the US. Their only link to the island is through shared memories, family traditions and habits. An aesthetic project that is even more daring from a conceptual point of view is offered by Josefina Báez in her celebrated play Dominicanish (2000). It is a text that is rich in nuances, intensity and unexpected crossroads; it is protean in every sense of the word. Even the title suggests heterogeneity as the defining mark of this aesthetic project: Dominicanish, a word that refers both to the mixing of English and Spanish in Santo Domingo as well as to a Dominicanness that is "incomplete," something highlighted through the use of the English suffix "ish," as Sophie Maríñez suggests in one of the few published analyses of this important work (2005: 150).

In one of the preliminary comments that function as prologue to *Dominicanish*, Báez describes her work as simultaneously a "monologue, dialogue" and a "conversation" (2000: 6). This description might equally be applied to her own formation as an immigrant woman (at times a solitary experience but also a conversation with other cultures), which explains the autobiographical tone that she employs in her work. Furthermore, the concept of the "monologue-conversation" also relates to her as someone belonging to a social conglomeration made up of individuals of the same class and national origin:

Recognizing my reality I laugh a lot about myself. And I am the same as a bunch of other people who have similar social origins; those of us who alternate laughter and crying, pleasures and fears, pain and drums, bachata and rap, here and there. I am a Dominican York. And this condition bestows upon me an infinity of constant and varied stimuli. (2000: 7)

When she uses the label "Dominican York" to refer to her reality as an immigrant in the United States, it could be argued that Báez assumes what Torres-Saillant has called "la condición rayana" [the border condition] to emphasize "the multiple cultural crossings that the whole of [Dominican] society lives through" (2003: 2). Báez thus provides this term with a positive meaning, despite the fact that the term was initially used by Dominicans on the island as a pejorative term to refer to their former compatriots and their descendents. Báez feels affectively connected to this diverse group that has to confront the harsh reality of discrimination despite contributing millions of dollars in remittances to the Dominican economy every year. By representing the anxieties and satisfactions of the daily life of the Dominican York subject, Báez illustrates the contradictory social history of the modern Dominican Republic and its diaspora.

To understand Báez's vision, it is useful to turn briefly to the history of Dominican emigration to New York. Even though there is evidence that a considerable number of Dominicans lived in New York at the beginning of the twentieth century – as can be verified by Pedro Henríquez Ureña's *Memorias* (2000: 66) – the wave of immigrants in the sixties after the end of the dictatorship has undoubtedly had the greatest impact on the social history of the Dominican Republic. The Dominican immigrants who settled in New York in the sixties and seventies consisted largely of militants

of the left and veterans of the civil war of 1965. These immigrants had been forced to emigrate by the government of Balaguer.

One has to stress, however, that the history of Dominican emigration to New York is complicated by two further factors. As the historian Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof writes in A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York After 1960 (2007), one of the big contradictions of Dominican society arises from the fact that a strong admiration for the US lifestyle alternates with a profound anti-imperialist sentiment that dominates the popular imaginary as a consequence of the US invasion of 1965. Hoffnung-Garskof thinks that the mirage of US modernity fostered by the media is to a large extent responsible for bringing about the increase in emigration to New York from the late sixties onwards. Dominicans settled mostly in Washington Heights, located in the Northern tip of Manhattan (2007: 95-96). The sociologist Carlos Dore Cabral arrives at similar conclusions when he explains the Dominican emigration to the United States. He emphasizes the role played by the "stimulus" of the receiving country to explain the extent of this human displacement:

In the case of the United States, the stimulus is found in the field of politics: their strategy of development and consolidation of a State [the Dominican Republic] were shaped by their neocolonial interests [...] [US] military intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965 had produced a "worrying" degree of rejection [of the US by the Dominican population], particularly by the middle class and the popular urban sectors. The policy on migration was therefore conceived as part of a more general domination: the border was opened to show the pleasant side of the empire. (2008: 30)

The fact that Dominican culture has survived in exile and that it is now an important aspect of New York is unquestionable. Equally certain is the fact that the economic power of the emigrants has transformed the Dominican Republic, especially when it comes to consumer habits. Over the last decades, the Dominican community -today the largest immigrant population of New York, with other large settlements also in San Juan in Puerto Rico, in Miami and Boston - has acquired considerable visibility in the United States in the domains of politics, culture, academia and sport. It is a booming community, one that has diverse interests but is united by the idea of a common national origin. The best example of this may be the Dominican-American National Roundtable, an organization that since 1997 brings together people of Dominican origin to further their common interests. In whatever way one chooses to look at this, the panorama I describe clearly suggests the existence of a diaspora, a type of community that is formed when groups of displaced people who do not think about a definitive return to the native country come together. The vitality of this diaspora is precisely what Dominicanish tries to illustrate.

In his comments on how he adapted Báez's poems to the stage in one of the prologues to *Dominicanish*, Claudio Mir emphasizes how difficult it is to find an adequate dramatic form for the selection. Interestingly, the technical reasons that Mir offers reaffirm the unpredictable nature of the diasporic condition that Báez assumes and defends as a way of life. Thus, Mir explains that, in the end, he chose to situate the piece "in no place, not in a street, not in a house, not in a court. It is as if Josefina was suspended in a non-defined place. In a place that allows her to transport herself rapidly between distant points" (2000: 10). In keeping with this statement, one might argue that *Dominicanish* constitutes a network that is underpinned by different axes that are

geographical, linguistic and cultural in nature. The collection of variables attached to these axes do not cancel each other out but activate a dynamic of integration. Indeed, in *Dominicanish*, the music of Billy Holiday, of the Isley Brothers and the philosophy and narrative of the Hindu tradition, amongst many other intertexts, are attributed equal importance. In the protagonist, this generates a process of learning that leads to perpetual irresolution.

The three axes (pertaining to geography, linguistics and culture) are entangled in the text and thus produce varied meanings. They point to the fact that, as Édouard Glissant suggests, identity is not an immutable essence but only another variable within a system of relations (2006: 141). The following extract from *Dominicanish* exemplifies the contrapuntal rhythm that characterizes the text from beginning to end:

There is La Romana
Here is 107th street ok
Tú sabes inglés?
Ay habla un chin para nosotros ver si
tú sabes
I was changed they were changed
he she it were changed too.
Pretérito pluscuamperfecto indicativo
imperativo
Back home
home is 107 ok
Full fridge
full of morisoñando con minute maid
To die dreaming as a maid in a minute. (Báez 31)

Biographical background information may explain why the scene alternates between New York and La Romana (a city located in the Eastern part of the Dominican Republic and the birthplace of the author). In terms of the linguistic axis, the fluctuation between English and Spanish – or perhaps rather between English and Dominican – is also in place in the introductory texts preceding the main text. The introductory notes include writings by Báez, Claudio Mir and Torres-Saillant in English and Spanish. However, to me the most interesting axis of meaning in *Dominicanish* consists of her approach to culture that surfaces in these lines:

Me chulié en el hall metí mano en el rufo Craqueo chicle como Shameka Brown Hablo como Boricua y me peino como Morena. (Báez 43)

[I kissed passionately in the hall I had sex on the roof I crack chewing gum like Shameka Brown I speak like a Boricua And I do my hair like a black woman.]

What springs to eye in this extract is the confluence of motives from Dominican and Puerto Rican culture, two cultures that are sometimes seen as antagonistic from a narrow and ignorant nationalist perspective. "Chuliarse," in Dominican, means to kiss passionately. "Meter mano" in Puerto Rican is synonymous of the sexual act. In *Dominicanish*, both idioms serve to highlight the undefined character of the poetic subject and the multiplicity of elements that contribute to her making. Similarly, the confession that the speaker does her hair "como morena" [like a black woman] has the effect of extolling a racial heritage that the vast majority of Dominicans tend to conceal at all cost. The mention of the type of hairdo is especially important when we take into

account that, as Ginetta Candelario points out, for Dominicans "hair is the principle bodily signifier of race, followed by facial features, skin color and, last, ancestry" (2007: 223).

Another line that dramatizes the cultural interweaving in Dominicanish is one I quoted earlier: "morisoñando con minute maid." She here alludes to a typical Dominican drink made from milk and orange juice. In the text, this drink prepared in New York is made from the globalized juice Minute Maid distributed by Coca Cola. "Full of morisoñando con minute maid. To die as a maid in a minute" (Báez 31), continues the poetic voice. The next sentence transfers the reader-spectator to the harsh reality of poor immigrants in the United States, who are forced to support themselves by working in service jobs on miserable salaries. In Dominicanish, the consciousness of the precarious social situation of the poor immigrant is of prime importance:

> Kings and servants depend/ on each other There can be no king without a servant And no servant without a king For silk comes out of a worm/ Gold out of rocks Fire from a piece of wood But have you heard about the friendship of a king?/... But then again, how can servants be well?/ It is said that the poor/ the sick, the dreamers and the fools always go into exile. (2000:40)

Another important concern in *Dominicanish* is the condition of women. The play thus takes up the legacy US feminism of the seventies, especially its use of "performance" as an instrument of subversion for confronting the cultural establishment. Back then, works like "Womanhouse" – an art installation and performance by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago in 1972 – had an essentially political motivation and involved intense artistic experimentation (Harper 1985: 766-774). Inspired by this legacy, Báez includes the issue of gendered identity into her revolutionary aesthetic. This section from *Dominicanish* best illustrates this idea:

Thanks to the Ganga, gracias al ganjes, los tígueres de Bengala no enchinchan la sed, el salto del tíguere hace rato que no es tántrico, thanks to the ganga *bengal tigers* don't move me, long gone tantric attacks. (2000:38)

She here refers to the "tíguere" (who is unfortunately characteristic of many Dominican men who aspire to Dominican society's machista ideals). In Dominican social typology, the "tíguere" refers to a type of Don Juan, who transcends all class barriers. Through her allusions to New York and India (the "gang" and the Ganges), Báez reveals a female subject who is independent and defines her own identity. Her criticism of the gender roles available to Dominicans is another subversive element that allows us to see Dominicanish as the emblem of an alternative pedagogy of the Dominican subject today. Also, one must agree with Torres-Saillant that, "as an illustration of a theory of dominicanidad, Dominicanish offers an open ontological frame where all that empirically fits into the life of the compatriots of the diaspora necessarily has to fit into the formulation of what/who we are as a nation" (2000: 16). Opening the doors to a theory of dominicanidad that does not depend on geography to justify itself, Dominicanish reaffirms the hazardous and gestural character of the interrelations involved in all processes of identity formation, whether individual or collective.

In short, it is in literature (defined in the strict sense as fiction and poetry) that we seem to find a solution to the

dilemma of how to overcome the symbolic monolith that even authors like Torres-Saillant unconsciously reinforce. This allows for the possibility of a new start, disrupting the axioms of all-embracing nationalist precepts that structure the island's *ethos*. Furthermore, as I observed earlier, in the playful nature of a particular strand of literature from the Dominican Republic, we can also observe a tendency to examine the mores and the institutional ethic of this unifying culture that I have called the *Trujillista* city. In fact, the kind of investigation carried out by these "divergent dictions" shares the critical approach to the theme of national identity with other forms of cultural production (such as the plastic arts, music and cinema). These divergent dictions provide an image of daily life on the island and its diaspora, the spaces in which the Dominican subject activates her labile strategy of resistance.

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